



PERMANENT COMMISSION ON THE VOCATION OF THE DOMINICAN COOPERATOR BROTHER

END OF TERM REPORT: 2020-2026

“The Spirit of the Lord has been given to me, because he has anointed me. He has sent me to bring the good news to the poor, to proclaim liberty to captives and to the blind, new sight, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”
(Luke 4:16-21)

A. INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

It indeed has been an extraordinary privilege to have been appointed by the Master of the Order to serve as members of the Permanent Commission for the Vocation of the Dominican Cooperator Brother. Our work has continued the work of previous commissions established by General Chapters. What we wish to present in the following pages is a new and dynamic direction which we believe is essential to promote our vocation and ministries as Dominican Cooperator Brothers in today world in need of hope and healing.

B. APPOINTMENT OF MEMBERS OF THE PERMANENT COMMISSION

On November 7, 2020, in response to Acta #194 of the Acts of the General Chapter of BIEN HOA (2019), the Master of the Order appointed the following Cooperator brothers to the Permanent Commission for the Vocation of the Dominican Cooperator brothers:

1. Herman De Porres Johnson, OP (Province of St Martin De Porres, United States)
2. Ignatius Perkins, OP, President (Province of St. Joseph, United States)
3. Xavier Plassat, OP (Province of St. Bartolomeu de las Vasas, Brazil)
4. Joseph Mai van Tuyan, OP (Province of Our Lady Queen of Martyrs, Viet Nam)
5. Daniel Mario Chukwuma O. Ibezim, OP (Province: St. Joseph the Worker, Nigeria and Ghana)

In addition, the Commission was well served by Fr. Mark Padrez, OP, Socius for Fraternal Life and Formation then later by Fr. Juan Manuel Hernandez, OP. The Socius served as the advocate and communication link with the Master of the Order

and the General Curia of the Order. We have also been very well served by Fr. Vivian Boland, OP, President of the Theological Commission on the Vocation of the Cooperator Brother in the Church and in the Order.

C. SUMMARY REPORT OF ACTIVITIES

1. Meetings were held on the following dates via Zoom;
 - a. October 12, 2020
 - b. December 14-15, 2020
 - c. December 7, 2021
 - d. January 18, 2022
 - e. March 1, 2022
 - f. November 22-24, 2023 (in person)
 - g. November 23-24, 2023 (Joint Meeting with the Theological Commission (in person)
 - h. December, 2023 – to the present
2. Email Communication were extensive between meetings;

D. EVALUATION:

1. Introduction to the Process

- A. Upon the review and approval of the members of the Permanent Commission, a survey guide was designed and distributed to the Regional Socii and all cooperator brothers to be used as a guide for discussions and recommendations. The reflections, recommendations and petitions from 62 cooperator brothers (26% of all Brothers in the Order) who participated in the regional assemblies or submitted individual comments are identified below. Additionally, a guide was also distributed to invite Brothers to describe their lives as Dominican Friars. These testimonies are to be published on the cooperator brothers site on the I.D.I. Twenty-five Brothers submitted written testimonies.
- B. The Commission recommends the design and implementation of the proposed program: *Synodality of the Renewal of the Vocation and Ministries of the Dominican Cooperator Brothers in the Church*. (See Appendices

If the vocation and ministry of Dominican Cooperator Brothers are to remain an essential part of the Charism of the Dominican Order it is urgent and critical that all brothers of the Order and our leadership give serious reflection and decisions to the implementation of these recommendations. No more studies or surveys are needed-it is now time for definitive actions.

2. Activities Implemented: Procedures, findings and petitions received from Meetings of the Commission, Findings, Petitions received from Regional Meetings, Testimonies of Cooperator Brothers, and Other Comments.

A. Program of Renewal of Dominican Life: Findings and Recommendations

- Our understanding and experience as preachers of divine grace: We are Dominican brothers following Christ according to the charism of the Order of Preachers. As such every Cooperator brother should be allowed to to fully and freely participate in the preaching mission of the Order without prejudice to priestly or sacramental functions.
- From our experiences, we bear witness to the Gospel of Jesus Christ in our different areas of apostolate. Currently, our experience shows that the Dominican missionary life or preaching work is more or less tied to sacramental ministry. Philosophy and theology are therefore often seen as academic programs for priestly formation rather than as programs for the training of a preacher who can preach anywhere and through various means.
- We are Dominican Brothers following Christ according to the charism of the Order of Preachers. As such there is an urgent need to promote Brothers understanding that they can engage in a wide variety of ministries, to find in many places and spaces the opportunity to share the Love of Christ and to facilitate the Brothers presence and gifts and the need to be fully integrated into the life of their communities and provinces.
- The flexibility of the possibilities for ministry, however, often comes with a lack recognition or valuing of the contribution the Cooperator brother makes, his versatility demotes him in the eyes of some to a tool which 'fills the gaps. Cooperator brothers also cooperate with priests, and how priests treat the cooperators tells us something about the health of our fraternity- this is a ministry too.
- Proactively acknowledge and emphasize that cooperator brothers are prophetic witnesses to our common vocation as preachers. The brother makes an essential contribution to the particular character of our community life, strengthening it in fraternity, mutual services, and tenderness;
- Emphasize that candidates are attracted by the rare humility and mystery of a balance between Apostolic and Contemplative Life;

- To promote Dominican Life and by living an authentic Dominican Life we can attract vocations;
- Focus on community life and growth in Holiness, which does not come from our jobs;
- Community reflection on who we are as Dominicans: called by Dominic to live heroically;
- Become more visible and respect differences between one vocation and another;
- Emphasize religious consecration and community life not just ministries;
- Return to living life as described in the Constitutions.
- When we live an authentic Dominican Life we will win the right to receive others;
- Celebrate a life of quiet or hidden silence, known not only by his life but also his actions;
- Increase visibility of cooperator brothers employing all forms;
- Consider changing the cooperator brothers habit to the black Scapular and to help the need for greater identity and visibility;
- Welcome those who want to put their lives at the service of God in the Order, using their skills or professional skills to bolster the communal life and the good of the Order;
- Speak about the Beauty of religious life; explain what community life offers communal life;
- Vocation weekends and retreats just for those interested in being a cooperator brother and for cooperator brothers (retreats just for them)

B. Vocation Promotion: Findings and Recommendations

- The unique characteristics of the vocation and ministry of the cooperator brother that can be implemented in our entities: Guided by the four pillars of the Dominican life, the cooperator brothers live out their charism in holiness, humility and simplicity, and by so doing reminding Dominicans that we are all brothers, brothers of St Dominic. We preach through these means:
 - Upholding the fraternal living of our communities
 - Management of material and financial resources
 - Management of our ministries;
 - Management of human resources
- Schedule meetings of provincials, directors of vocations and formators, where the specifics of each vocation are presented to the students and the brothers responsible for promotion and formation.

- Schedule periodic meetings with vocation promoters to present them with the specific identity and ministries of the Cooperator brother;
- Need to prepare, publish and distribute materials to promote the vocation of the cooperator brothers (articles, brochures, testimonies, etc.) and use of the media to disseminate them.
- Need to review and revise existing province materials to assure inclusive language;
- Celebrate the lives of St. Martin and St. John Macias to promote the vocation of cooperator brothers.
- Integrate cooperator brothers into vocation promotion teams and invite Brothers to participate in vocation meetings
- Establish promotional programs in Provinces and regions, nationally and internationally that include Come and See Weekends, presentations of the Vocation to parish congregations, ministries; national organizations; etc;
- Use of a variety of communication methods is essential, e.g. face-to-face meetings; retreats; virtual media is essential, e.g., paper; internet, etc.;
- Establish an Annual International Dominican Cooperator Brothers Day on the Feast of St. Martin de Porres, OP, November 3;
- Delete the term “cooperator” and simply use the term “Dominican Brother;”
- Pressing issues that can affect the renewal of our vocation:
 - Strengthening of the formation (spiritual, apostolic, human and so on) of the cooperator brothers;
 - Discrimination regarding the cooperator brothers' vocation;
 - Insufficient awareness and understanding of the vocation and value of the cooperator brother's vocation;
 - Deliberate rejection or indifference of the role and importance of cooperator brothers by clerical brothers
 - Poor academic formation of cooperator brothers, particularly as preachers and ministers of the Gospel;
 - Low self-esteem, lack of self-belief, and unwillingness to develop oneself;
- Points of interest to present to candidates interested in pursuing life as a Cooperator brother:
 - Ask him about his motivations and what he knows of the cooperator brother's vocation.
 - Encourage him to stand firm in his right convictions;
 - Inform him that a cooperator brother, like any Dominican, a believer and a preacher of the Good News and, of course, he must be well prepared to preach.
 - He should not see the cooperator brother vocation as an escape

from the world.

- Encourage and accompany the candidate by showing the positive values of the Cooperator brother vocation.

- Some reasons for the growth or decline of the vocation of the vocation of cooperator brothers::

- Regarding growth, we need the presence of cooperator brothers among the teams of vocation promoters and/or formators.
- As for understanding the decline and interventions;
 - promotion of the vocation;
 - cultural orientation (for example in Africa, where a man is seen either as a priest or a married man;
 - Poor or lack of understanding of the Cooperator brother vocation among Dominicans;
 - Casual or non-implementation of General Chapter decisions concerning Cooperator brothers;
 - the growing culture of clericalism and indifference to the value of the vocation ministry of the cooperator brother;
 - Failure to address disparity concerns in the basic academic formation (philosophy and theology) of a Dominican friar
- Urgent need for the appointment of Vocation Promoters and formators who have a balanced understanding of Dominican life and are willing to collaborate with Cooperator brothers.
- Deliberate sensitization and reorientation of brothers by superiors and Cooperator brothers about the need for mutual respect among brothers, clerical or cooperator.
- Production of visual promotion materials for dissemination to the faithful via social media or otherwise.
- Experiences of our relations with clerical Brothers: Our relations seem good; however, we notice that sometimes they do not consider us as essential members of the Order. For instance, some student brothers denigrate us, viewing us as people without value, as those meant to serve them, or even as inferior beings. The same holds true for some priest brothers, who go as far as to discourage us so that we may change our minds and seek Ordination. At times, they feel challenged by the zeal with which some of us approach our work, apostolate, or studies

C. Initial and Continuing Formation: Findings and Recommendations:

- Include the study of the Theology of Religious Life, specifically of the work of the Theological Commission, and to study the documents that the Church has published as well as the *Ratio Formationis Particularis (RFP)* and the *Ratio Studiorum Particularis (RSP)* on the cooperator brother;
- Schedule regional meetings of Cooperator brothers, one virtual each year and one every three years face-to-face (formation meetings – personal fulfillment from our option, deepening the elements of contemplation, study, preaching and service);
- Following institutional formation, promote specific or technical formation according to the vocation of each candidate and the needs of the ministry;
- Assure institutional formation is the same for all Cooperator brothers;
- The formation of Cooperator brothers must be more accompanied by the formators so that they know and value the vocation of the cooperating friar (regents, formators and superiors)
- Form Directors of Vocations and Formators in the specific vocation of the Brother Cooperator
- Develop and publish a newsletter on the Cooperator brother that reflect the *Ratio Formtionis Particularis* and addresses the need to focus on Dominican formation, spirituality, and Dominican Life;
- Appoint Cooperator brothers to Vocation Councils and Formation Council;
- Establish a common novitiate with clerical students;
- Post-Novitiate: a common formation program with clerical students;
- Promote interprovincial cooperation (e.g. The Angelicum; Providence College; University Santo Thomas; Dominican School of Philosophy and Theology)
- Emphasize thar all formation programs need not require academic credits or terminal degrees e.g. certifications; continuing education programs;
- Scholarships and endowments need to be developed to support Cooperator brothers enrolled in institutional and post-institutional programs, consistent with the *Ratio Studiorum Generalis & Ratio Formtionis Particularis and the need of the Church*

D. Mission and Ministries: Findings and Recommendations:

- Conduct visits of Provinces and Vicariates that do not have Cooperator brothers and to offer support to help develop and promote the vocation and ministries;
- Schedule periodic virtual meetings to share the mission that each Province carries out in their place;

- Urge provincials, when making an assignment of Cooperator brothers, clearly specify what the Brother is bringing to that community;
- Format a publication for the story of the cooperative brother to be told. Works, life, etc.
- Remind the provincials of the study and dissemination of Augustine Thompson's book, especially in the novitiate.
- Develop a vocational prayer for the cooperator brothers for the whole region;
- Design structured programs, i.e. learning strategies and outcomes that reflect the components in the letters of Pope Francis, and the Master of our Order;
- Since not every Province has the resources to implement the renewal program, programs will welcome Brothers from other Province that encourages interprovincial cooperation (e.g. The Angelicum; Providence College; University Santo Thomas; Dominican School of Philosophy and Theology)
- Scholarships and endowments need to be developed to support Cooperator brothers enrolled in programs, consistent with the *Ratio Studiorum Generalis & Ratio Formationis Particularis*
- Develop specific projects with a budget for training and vocational promotion

E. Proposed Petitions to Enhance the Work of the Permanent Commission

- Appointment of a Curial Promoter of the Vocations of Cooperator brothers who will bring to these discussions and decisions the voice and experience of one who is gifted with this vocation.
- Appoint Promoters in the Provinces who will form a working team to promote the vocation and to assure accountability;
- Work collaboratively with the Permanent Commission, with the Socius for Fraternal Life and Formation, and the Theological Commission and all Regional Socii:
 - ✓ considering the findings of the Regional Meetings of Cooperator Brothers to design, provide oversight, direction and accountability for the process of renewal;
 - ✓ to organize regional and international meetings every three years;
 - ✓ to assure compliance with the *Ratio Studiorum Generalis & Ratio Formationis Particularis* and the specific versions applicable to each Province.
- Annually revise and publish the International Directory of Dominican Cooperator brothers;
- Establish an Annual International Dominican Cooperator brothers Day on the Feast of St. Martin de Porres, OP, November 3;
- Delete the term “Cooperator” and simply use the term “Dominican Brother;”

- Appointment of cooperator brothers to appropriate committees and commissions of the Order;
- Assure there is a conscious effort by all brothers to actively involve Cooperator Brothers in different decision-making structures: Chapters of the local community; Provincial; General; Councils; Commissions;
- Expand the members of the Permanent Commission for the Vocation of Dominican Cooperator brother to include Cooperator brothers as regional Representatives;
- Petition the Dicastery for Consecrated Life and Societies for Apostolic Life to appoint a religious brother as a voting member of the Dicastery.

F. ACTIVITIES PENDING WITH RATIONAL

Historically, the process and outcomes for implementing change to increase awareness and value of our vocation and ministry and recruit men to follow the life of a Dominican Cooperator brother has been limited. While only a few provinces are witnessing growth in numbers, overall the number of cooperator brothers continue decline. In reviewing the number of cooperator brothers in the Order there were 828 brothers in 1980. In 2024 the number was 228. This represents a decline of 74% when compared with our priest brothers.

Several factors continue to contribute to the disappearance of cooperator brothers, namely:

- a. Failure to promote the vocation in the public media and on websites;
- b. Lack of promotional recruitment and vocational programs and materials;
- c. The use of exclusive language in describing Dominican life;
- d. Indifference to the value of non-ordained Brothers in the ministries of the Province;
- e. Poor representation of Brothers at General and Provincial Chapters and on Province councils, commissions and committees;
- f. Absence of accountability of Provinces for promoting the vocation and establishing and maintaining programs for formation and ministry;
- g. The increasing culture of clericalism;
- h. Limited distribution of the complete studies to the Capitulars of General Chapters.

G. COMMUNICATION WITH THE REGIONAL SOCI, PRIOR PROVINCIALS, COOPERATOR BROTHERS

- a. Communication between the Permanent Commission has largely been through the regional socii and the cooperator brothers;

- b. The results of all studies, testimonies, and relevant documents were translated into French and Spanish and distributed to all regional socii and cooperator brothers;
- c. The Order's Media Web Site under Fr. Patrick Briscoe, OP, recently appointed as the Promoter General for Social Communication, has markedly improved communications on the cooperator brothers.
- d. Fr. Raul Gomez Sanchez, OP, Secretary General, has also been an invaluable resource in promoting the work of the Permanent Commission
- e. Fr. Vivian Boland, OP, President of the Theological Commission on the Vocation of the Cooperator brother in the Church and in the Order, was an invaluable partner in the work of the Commission.

H. RECOMMENDATIONS TO IMPROVE AND ADVANCE THE PURPOSE OF THE COMMISSION

There is an urgency to deliberately move forward on the renewal of the vocation of the Dominican Cooperator brother. The following data presents the annual statistics on Dominican Cooperator brothers: Solemn and Simple Professed and Novice among the 44 Provinces, Vice Provinces and Vicariates throughout the Order as of December 31, 2024. In summary:

Province and Vice Provinces:	43
Cooperator brothers: Solemnly Professed	218
Cooperator brothers: Simply Professed:	16
Cooperator brothers: Novices:	1
Provinces with No Cooperator brothers:	7
Provinces with No Cooperator brothers Novices:	42

Comments:

1. Statistics were provided by the Office of the Secretary General of the Curia and represent data provided by the Provinces, Vice Provinces, and Vicariates. They report a continuing decline when compared with previous years. For example, in 1980 there were 838 Cooperator brothers; in 2023 there are 238 Brothers. This represents of 74% decline. At this writing Cooperator brothers are 4% of all professed Friars in the Order.
2. Several studies in recent years have examined contributing factors leading to this decline; a phenomenon that is being experienced by many Orders and Congregations in recent years.
3. Though these historical trends are important, the work of the Permanent Commission and that of the Theological Commission is to prepare a process for the renewal of the vocation and ministry of the Dominican Cooperator brother in response to the urgent needs of the Church, the call of Pope Francis, and the Master of the Order to become missionary disciples as was the vision and

charism of St. Dominic when he founded our Order.

4. Without a definitive action plan, as identified in the following findings and petitions, the Dominican Cooperator brother will eventually disappear.
5. When appointing new members of the Permanent Commission, it is strongly recommended that at least one member of the present Commission be appointed in to order to assure continuity in this work.

As we move forward in creating a renewed vision and ministry for Dominican Cooperator brothers in our world, the Permanent Commission invited all brothers of our Provinces and Vicariates to participate in this survey. In this important work, we are reminded of the invitation of Jesus *“let us cross to the other side”* (Mk: 4:35), and follow Him and his disciples as they travelled deep into pagan lands to announce the message of the kingdom, to be unafraid to cross all frontiers even to the ends of the earth, and to welcome to our common home the lost, the last, the least, the unloved, the unwanted, victims of bondage and human trafficking, and those forced to live on the periphery of human life in deafening anonymity. Amen

I. PROPOSED WORK PLAN FOR THE REMAINING YEAR OF THE COMMISSION AND INCLUDE THE FOLLOWING ACTA OF THE 2025 GENERAL CHAPTER (NOS: 186, 187)

With the publication of the ACTA of the General Chapter, the Commission will continue to review the ACTA of the General Chapters and their implications for furthering the work of the Commission as it transfers its responsibility to the new members of the Commission. The review will consider the following ACTA in addition to other relevant documents::

- a. **ACTS of the General Chapter of Bien Hoa (2019):**
 - Nos. 189, 190, 191, 192, 193, 195, 196, 197, 199
- b. **ACTS of the General Chapter of Tultenango (2022)**
 - Nos. 78, 82, 184, 189, 174, 189, 190, 207, 339, 340)
- c. **ACTS of the General Chapter of Krakow (2025)**
 - Nos.185; 186; 187; 188; 189
 - Relatio of the Master of the Order: 5; 6; 7; 38; 47
- d. **Report of the Theological Commission for the Cooperator Brother in the Order and in the Church: 12;18; 20; 23; 26; 27; 32; 34;39;**
- e. **Design and Implementation of the Proposed Synodality Program**

It is anticipated that meetings between the current membership of the Permanent Commission and the new members will be arranged to assure continuity in this important work and to arrange

J. APPENDICES:

A. SYNODALITY PROGRAM FOR THE RENEWAL OF THE VOCATION AND MINISTRY OF THE DOMINICAN COOPERATOR BROTHER

*“He sent them out to preach the kingdom of God and to heal the sick.”
(Lk. 9:2).*

The work of the Permanent Commission has been an extraordinary event as carefully detailed in the Commission’s *End of Term Report*. What is now urgently needed is to design and implement a process of synodality in order to engage the larger Church to determine how the renewed vocation and ministry of the Dominican Cooperator Brother can respond to the needs of a wounded and divided Church and world desperately in need of healing and hope.

Historically, the founders of religious orders, Dominicans as well, established ministries based on the needs of the Church. More specifically, St. Dominic listened and heard the needs of the Church and its people and founded our Order. Should this be considered a critical component in a synodality process in his time?

For many decades the discussion of the vocation and ministry of the Dominican Cooperator Brother has been largely internally focused. We are now in a new age today where the process of listening, dialogue and caring in response to the voices and experiences of a suffering Church and world has nearly disappeared. Cardinal Radcliffe’s book, *Listening Together: Medications on Synodality*¹ carefully articulates the need to listen again and offers suggestions in how this process can be employed. Pope Francis’ *Fratelli Tutti: On Fraternity and Social Friendship* also addresses the need to engage the many groups of people, often marginalized and forgotten, into the synodality process. The recently published research *Why Religion Went Obsolete: The Demise of Traditional Faith in America*³ by Christian Smith provides significant insight on the depth, breadth and causes of the wounds in the Church and society.

We believe that the vibrant and sustained renewal of our vocation and invite others to become Dominican Brothers can only occur when, like St. Dominic,

¹ Radcliffe, Timothy (2024). *Listening Together: Medications on Synodality*. Collegeville, Minnesota, Liturgical Press

² Pope Francis (2020). *Fratelli Tutti: On Fraternity and Social Friendship*. Washington, DC: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops.

³ Smith, Christian (2025). *Why Religion Went Obsolete: The Demise of Traditional Faith in America*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press,

we listen and then respond to the needs of all the People of God. As Preachers of Grace to the whole world, we, like our priest brothers, have the moral responsibility to listen to one another and the Church and to respond to their needs.

What the Commission is proposing is the development of an Introduction and Outline that can be used in different cultures and provinces throughout the Order. It would be the responsibility of the Permanent Commission along with designated Friars in each Province to facilitate the process. It will also require meetings with Province members to assure they understand and support the process.

Several key themes have been articulated that we believe are foundational to the success of this endeavor:

1. Participation of all the People of God: Friars, Nuns, Sisters, Laity, Clergy, especially the poor, the unwanted, the unloved, the differently abled, those who have been abused by others, the marginalized, the imprisoned, and the forgotten;
2. Listening, Being Present and Building Relationships: co-responsibility, open conversations; encouraging personal; stories, moving beyond debates to genuine understanding and response.
3. Discernment to what the Holy Spirit and the Church are calling for the next generation of Dominican Cooperator Brothers;
4. Promoting hope and renewal and an understanding that Church has given men to the Order to become Dominican Brothers; we then have moral responsibility to return our gifts to the Church as Dominican Brothers.
5. Reviewing relevant documents of the Church and the Order including the teachings on the dignity of the human person, freedom and human flourishing;
6. Discussing the Holy Spirit's role in discerning and promoting vocations;
7. Understanding the beauty of the ministry and the power of the vocation and ministry;
8. Understanding the needs of a suffering Church and how Brothers are called to bring healing and hope;
9. Identifying challenges and a pastoral plan of action;
10. Planning days of recollection, retreats;
11. Responding to the need to promote diversity, equity and inclusion.

Prayer to the Creator

*Lord, Father of our human family, you created all human beings equal in dignity;
pour forth into our hearts a fraternal spirit and inspire in us a dream of
renewed encounter, dialogue, justice and peace. Move us to create healthier societies
and a more dignified world, a world without hunger, poverty, violence and war.
(Pope Francis: Fratelli Tutti, p. 133)*

**B. CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES OF THE SPIRITUALITY OF THE
RELIGIOUS BROTHER, Vivian Boland, OP, President, Theological
Commission of the Cooperator Brother in the Order and in the Church, 2025**

‘Only’ a brother?

It is probable that every professed brother has been asked at one time or other ‘why are you *only* a brother?’ Speaking with a commission of our Order, Brother Michael McAward SM said that reactions brothers still receive include that question along with other related questions such as ‘why did you not go all the way’ or ‘doesn’t the Church need priests and it seems like a waste of good resources to stop at being just a brother’. Implied in these questions is the idea that the brother’s is somehow an interrupted vocation, a stop on the journey towards priestly ordination which for some reason failed to reach its goal.

This attitude continues to be strongly felt in certain parts of the world where there are many vocations to the priesthood but practically none to the brotherhood. In such places, it is considered a second-class vocation, sometimes even a shame on a family to have a son who is *only* a brother when other families have sons who become priests. In some cultures, the response to the brother implies that he is not a real man since he is neither the father of a child nor a priest. It seems as if the brother is nothing!

Such an attitude fails to appreciate the brother’s distinct vocation and state of life in the Church. But then the Church itself finds it difficult to know where to fit men who are consecrated but not ordained.ⁱ It is all too easy to fall back into defining them by their work, by what they do – running schools, managing hospitals – but as an end in itself, what is the vocation of the brother?

Varieties of Brotherhood

There are two main kinds of professed brothers in the Church. There are those who belong to the great teaching and nursing congregations, which are lay institutes in the Church, and whose members are all brothers: professed laymen. Some of these congregations, for example that of Saint John of God, will also have a few members who are ordained priests to take care of the spiritual and sacramental needs of the brothers.

The other main kind of brother is the lay or cooperator brother who is a member of a clerical institute in which, because of the particular charism

and mission of the institute, the majority of its members are priests. Such are, for example, Dominican and Jesuit brothers.

There are also some ‘mixed’ institutes in which, because priests and brothers were both fully present in the foundational moment of the institute, they continue to be so in its ongoing life and governance. Examples are the Congregation of Holy Cross (whose current superior general is a brother) and the Marianists. Although popularly termed ‘mixed’, these are actually clerical institutes with particular dispensations considering their origin and traditions.

Witnesses of Consecrated Life

To the question ‘why are you only a brother?’ we can add this: the Dominican cooperator brother, for example, who is a fully professed friar of the Order, is a living witness to the fact that the Dominican friars who are ordained are not ‘only’ priests but are also consecrated religious men. In this the brothers offer an invaluable correction to any tendency that would swallow up the religious vocation of the friar in the pastoral work of the priest. Such ‘swallowing up’ easily happens because of the pressing needs to which the priest should respond and the satisfaction which comes to him from his pastoral work.

So, the brother calls the Dominican priest to remember that he is also a consecrated religious man whose consecrated life is in itself a preaching witness to the priority of Christ. As one of our Dominican nuns has said ‘if there is God, he deserves everything’ and religious life is the gift of oneself entirely to God following the counsels of Jesus in the gospels. Brothers in clerical institutes have done an amazing number of things over the centuries. The very variety of their activities confirms that the brother is not defined by his work, by what he does, but is rather defined by what he is: a man who has given himself totally to Christ.ⁱⁱ

The Religious Order as an Ecclesial Family

Each religious order or congregation tends to become an ‘ecclesial family’ with many states of life represented in its membership. In traditional terms there have always been first order friars, second order nuns and third order laity, sisters and priests. Add to those, in modern times, secular institutes, confraternities and sodalities, associates and auxiliaries. Just as the Church is an ‘ordered communion’, so each of these ecclesial families is an ordered communion with members living different vocations and states of life but all sharing a common spirituality coming from the founder’s charismatic grace. In his letter to the Dominicans marking the eighth centenary of the death of Saint Dominic, Pope Francis wrote about this: ‘The Dominican charism of preaching overflowed early into the establishment of the varied

branches of the larger Dominican family, embracing all the states of life in the Church.’ⁱⁱⁱ

Recent developments in Church practice and in ecclesiology have strengthened this sense of belonging together in one communion of grace, all cooperating in the one mission of Christ, on the basis of the common priesthood in which all share and also, in a second moment, on the basis of the sacramental priesthood to which some are called in service of the Church. Today this means not only co-operation or collaboration with the hierarchy but co-responsibility for the Church’s life and mission, as Pope Benedict XVI stressed in an address to the Church of Rome and as the synodal process initiated by Pope Francis has made clear.^{iv}

What is a Spirituality?

The brother finds his place, therefore, within the consideration of the consecrated life, the gospel lived radically in a life given completely to God and to which both clerical and lay members of the Church are called. It is their way of responding to the call to holiness while other Christians respond to that call in other ways and in other states of life.

In speaking about the ‘spirituality’ of the brother, or indeed of any member of the Church, we are speaking about the practice of faith. In the past the study of spirituality in the Christian sense was referred to as ‘ascetical and mystical’ theology. What are the ways in which a Christian person lives their faith from day to day? What kinds of prayer do they engage in, for example, and how is it undertaken in a daily or weekly arrangement? When we distinguish Benedictine, Carmelite and Jesuit spiritualities it is in the first place their approach to prayer which gets our attention. There are other practices also that can be identified within each tradition, forms of discipline and penance, understandings of human psychology and experience, particular emphases in promoting the teaching of the gospel, perhaps a collection of customs and traditions of devotion developed from the founder which give a particular flavour and style to a religious congregation and help to distinguish its members from others.

When we speak of the brother’s spirituality, then, we mean just this collection of practices, forms of discipline and ways of praying, that seem to be required if the brother is to live well the vocation he has received, expressing it and strengthening it in his life each day. Clearly there is considerable overlap across the range of spiritualities in the Church. Some

things are fundamental to any living of a Christian life but our particular interest here is to specify what characterises the spirituality of the brother.

From Where Comes the Brother's Spirituality?

Where a baptised and confirmed Christian has a ministry in the Church, whether a baptismal ministry founded on the common priesthood of all the baptised, or an ordained ministry founded on the sacrament of Holy Orders, it is relatively easy to determine characteristics that ought to shape the spirituality of such a person. In all cases there will be a role in the liturgical celebrations of the Church, whether as priest or deacon, lector or acolyte. There will also be an apostolate that extends from the particular liturgical role into the ordinary life of the community which the minister is called to serve. Thus, the lector reads at the liturgy but also has a responsibility for the promotion of the Word of God through, for example, bible study and *lectio divina*. The acolyte serves at the altar but also has a responsibility for bringing the Eucharist to the sick of the community and perhaps also in preparing people to receive Holy Communion for the first time. The bishop, priest and deacon likewise have clear liturgical roles but whose meaning extends into the life of the community which each one serves in ways appropriate to their ministry. Although there is no particular liturgical role for the catechist, his or her spirituality will also get its character from the way in which they serve the formation of the community.

From their liturgical function and the wider service to which it points emerges the spirituality that ought to characterise the life of faith and prayer of each one who has a ministry in the Church. Each one who has such a function and service is called to live a spirituality appropriate for exercising that function and for giving that service as well as possible. Of course, all Christians are called to receive and to meditate on the Word of God, to value the Eucharist and to live out the communion which it represents and establishes among us. But one who has a particular ministry will live the Christian life with particular characteristics, concerns and practices.

Where does this leave the religious brother, however? He does not have any particular liturgical role, nor any particular apostolate following from such a role. Of course he may also be an acolyte, lector or catechist but we are trying to focus on the spirituality that will be his simply as a professed brother in the Church. Like other lay Christians he gets his spirituality from his baptism and confirmation – to respond to the call to holiness by living a life of faith, hope and charity, by persevering in prayer, participating in the liturgies of the Church and reaching out in some way in charitable service. The renewed appreciation of the lay vocation in the Church, and the fact that non-ordained members of the Church can now undertake many kinds of

ministry, may have affected the number of vocations to the brotherhood but it also helps to illuminate the brother's vocation. It means that those who are attracted to it are attracted not in order to do something for the Church, which they could just as easily do as married or unmarried lay people, but they are attracted for the sake of this way of life itself.

The brother's spirituality is also shaped by his profession in a particular religious Order or congregation. He shares in the charismatic grace of the founder of the Order which helps to give a further flavour to his spirituality. He is a baptised and confirmed Christian called to live his Christian life in the way of Dominic or Francis, of Ignatius Loyola or John Bosco. But, through his baptism, confirmation and religious profession, the brother's spirituality depends ultimately on his personal holiness. We see it very clearly in the life of Martin de Porres (1579-1639), probably the best known and most popular of the Dominican saints. Martin was a friar who was not ordained but who, like Catherine of Siena, followed the way of Dominic with exceptional dedication to the promotion of truth and the spread of charity. Canonised just before Vatican II opened, Martin was held up by Pope John XXIII as a model for what the renewed Church should be like. Martin's authority in the Church and in the Order flowed completely from his personal holiness, his own spiritual and evangelical life as a Christian and as a consecrated man.^v

The Dominican brother – to stay with that particular example – will be a man drawn to take up the preaching mission of the Order precisely as a consecrated religious. He is a man who desires to reveal Christ to the world through the 'holy preaching', which is the entire project of a Dominican community, and his call is to contribute to that mission in the particular way that comes from what a brother is.

The Brother – Invisible But Essential?

I rely here on the wisdom of a Dominican brother who explained his understanding of his vocation by referring me to the story of the healing of Naaman the Syrian in 2 Kings 5.1-19. Along with the remembered figures, the important people in the story such as Naaman himself, the king of Aram whom he served, the prophet Elisha, and the king of Israel, there are a number of people who are almost invisible, not usually thought about or remembered, but whose contribution is essential for the working out of the miracle. Such are the girl who tells Naaman's wife about the prophet Elisha, the messengers from Elisha to the king of Israel and to Naaman, and the servants who calmed Naaman's anger and persuaded him to do what the prophet had told him to do. These are the 'co-operators' in the story, not protagonists, but essential to what happened and to how it happened. They

shared their knowledge, facilitated communication, and encouraged maturity and practical wisdom when Naaman was tempted to panic.

‘Little’ seems to go well in francophone contexts where brothers and sisters of a number of congregations are happy to call themselves ‘little brothers’ or ‘little sisters’, *les petits frères* or *les petites sœurs*. I know a Dominican brother, again within a francophone context, who rejoices in this designation. It does not translate easily into other languages, however, and it can be difficult for one who does not share this vocation to say that those who are called to it ought to be characterised by the virtues of humility and simplicity, while thinking of themselves as ‘little’.

The model for this is, of course, Jesus himself who is the model for all Christian vocations and states of life. All are called to follow his way of humility. His love and self-emptying in obedience to the Father is the world’s salvation (Philippians 2.5-11). Unless we become like little children, we shall not enter the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 18.3). In the end we are all unworthy servants called to do what is being asked of us (Luke 17.10). Again and again, Jesus calls his disciples to radical living, to complete self-giving in the service of the gospel, to what the poet T.S. Eliot summarised as ‘a condition of complete simplicity costing not less than everything’.^{vi} All Christians are called to follow Christ along that way of the cross but the brother’s vocation is a particularly powerful testimony to the cost of discipleship freely embraced. As Jesus responded to the mission entrusted to him by his Father, the brother seeks to respond to his call to follow Christ in self-giving and simplicity.

The Brother Witnesses to Fraternity

It is reasonable to think that the brother’s contribution to the life of the Church will be connected with the theme of brotherhood or fraternity. The history of humanity is marked by conflict, often violent, between brothers. The first murder recorded in the biblical history is that of Abel at the hands of his brother Cain. Later sibling rivalries, such as that between Esau and Jacob, punctuate that history. Often the Lord seems to provoke such rivalry by preferring the brother who, in our eyes, seems least entitled: Jacob is preferred to Esau, Joseph to his brothers, David to his brothers, and the ‘beloved disciple’ is believed to be John the Evangelist himself, traditionally the youngest of the apostles. Outside the Bible there are dramatic stories of rivalry and conflict such as that involving Romulus and Remus and the foundation of the city of Rome. The work of René Girard is a profound exploration of the dynamics of desire, envy and rivalry which are seen in so many historical events. The spiral of violence is only broken, Girard argues, by the way in which Jesus received the envy and jealousy of others, suffered it in his passion

and death, his sacrifice becoming then the act which heals fraternity among human beings. Saint Paul already spoke of this: 'he is our peace; in his flesh he has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us' (Ephesians 2.14). He is the brother of all who breaks the cycle of violence. We can look to the consecrated brother, therefore, as a witness to the importance of fraternity in human life. That fraternity is often fractured, needing to be developed and strengthened, but it is another way of speaking about the call to holiness which brings the Church into being. Saint Paul's preferred way of speaking to the members of the churches he established is to address them as his 'brothers and sisters'. The grace which they have received through him expresses itself in a 'fraternal life', a life lived in reconciliation and communion. To the first converts at Corinth, so often and so deeply divided already it seems, Paul writes: 'I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you should be in agreement and that there should be no divisions among you, but that you should be united in the same mind and the same purpose' (1 Corinthians 1.10).

It is what is sought by those who live the common life of the religious community, to 'be of one heart and mind' as the Rule of Saint Augustine puts it. The brother's witness to fraternity is not limited to his brothers and sisters within the Christian communion but is for all people. It was a central preoccupation of Pope Francis during the years of his pontificate, to encourage fraternity and to promote fraternity, and to enter into relations with members of other religions and of none, seeking to give real worth to that third value of the modern world, 'fraternity'. Liberty and equality get plenty of attention: what about fraternity? And what might be the contribution of the religious brother to building up the fraternity to which his consecrated life already witnesses?

The Brother Lives a Prophetic Life

It is often said that religious life belongs to the prophetic aspect of the Church's life, that it belongs to the charismatic rather than the institutional side of the Church's life. Although this language is commonly used, it is important not to put it at the service of a dualistic vision that would threaten the communion shared by all its members. But precisely because the brother is often overlooked, living simply and sometimes invisibly, his authority coming directly from his personal holiness and spirituality, he can be a peripheral figure, and therefore also at times disruptive of too comfortable an accommodation with the world.

Experience shows that it has often been the Dominican brother in a community of friars who is the best-known face of the community, the one who interacts with the people of the neighbourhood, the one who gets to be

known particularly by the poor and others who are peripheral, invisible, overlooked. It is also true – a point frequently preached by Pope Francis – that the periphery often becomes the vanguard, the place in which the Church's fidelity to Christ's mission is renewed in its intensity and in its reach. When the Church speaks of consecrated men and women it regards them as particularly concerned with the poor and with giving witness to fraternal life. The brother's prophetic role therefore, since he is 'only a brother', is to offer, in its purest and simplest form, this witness to care for the poor and for fraternity among human beings.

'Only' a Brother = 'Only' a Consecrated Religious?

The question of the brother's vocation is the question of the value or purpose of the religious life itself since it is there that he finds his identity. The crisis in religious life, which is seen in the significant drop in vocations to the sisterhood and brotherhood in the Church, can lead to one of two distorting reactions: one is to clericalize the vocation of the consecrated woman or man, and the other is to subject it to activist or utilitarian criteria. In fact, it is simply about the gift of oneself totally to Christ, a state of life which gets its meaning from a level other than that of function or activity whether within the Church or in the world. The 'pointlessness' of the contemplative nun's vocation is perhaps the closest to that of the brother. In practice, each is busy with many things from day to day but the meaning of their vocation is not from the things they do but from what they are, from where they have given their hearts.

The purpose of religious life is to adorn the Church by glorifying God and sanctifying those who are called to it. Whenever he was asked why he had become a Dominican, Herbert McCabe, a renowned preacher of the English province, always answered by saying 'to save my soul'. The universal call to holiness is a call to all men and women to be baptised and then to live out the implications of that baptism in the way to which the Lord calls each one. But it is always in order to glorify God in the gifts God gives to his children and through those gifts of grace to ensure their *salus*, their well-being and salvation.

Religious life thus belongs to the way of beauty of which recent Popes have often spoken. It is a way of life whose meaning and purpose are to be found simply in the love which draws people to it and which becomes the foundation and guiding star of their lives. It reveals the beauty of Christ's love in our world, a love to be admired and received rather than used. So, it belongs essentially to the contemplative dimension of the Christian life, manifesting the beauty of Christ and of drawing people to Christ. The brother witnesses by his spirituality to the religious life itself, to the gift of himself to God and to Christ, the Word of God.

A Representative Function?

Besides the temptation to define the brother in terms of what he can do, there is sometimes a tendency to define the brother in terms of what he can represent for others. Among the Dominicans, for example, it is tempting to speak of the brother sacra mentalising the fraternal aspect of our vocation just as we might speak of the Dominican nun sacra mentalising its contemplative aspect. They are to be outward signs of inward charismatic graces, in the traditional language of sacramental theology. We can think of values like poverty and simplicity, fraternity and availability, as particularly associated with the brother's vocation. But to think of him being delegated exclusively to carry these values or as existing simply to remind everybody of them would be just another way of subjecting his vocation to utilitarian criteria, even if they are holy and admirable criteria. It is true that by his life the brother is a witness to certain values for others, including for his ordained brethren who are also consecrated religious, but once again this is not the purpose of his life which is simply to be a consecrated religious man.

If he can be described then as 'a mirror and memory' of the Church it is because his life calls all members of the Church back to essential things. He calls us back to the non-functional, the non-instrumental, the thing which is of value in itself and for no further purpose, the one thing necessary. This can be disquieting as well as heartening, a call to allow the Lord to cultivate one more time the soil of our hearts and minds. It is what humility means, a willingness to live in the truth of our poverty and to allow the gardener of our souls to work on us again.

Within a religious order such as the Order of Preachers, therefore, concern about the brother's vocation is a concern about our understanding and appreciation of religious life itself. That means that concern about the brother and his vocation is a concern about the integrity of the Dominican vocation as a whole. This can be understood horizontally, meaning the Order is fully present where friars who are priests and friars who are brothers live the 'holy preaching' together. But it is also to be understood intentionally, meaning that to forget or undervalue our religious consecration means forgetting or undervaluing the fulness of the Dominican vocation in whichever state of life it is being lived.

A Life Lived Towards Heaven

The preface for Masses offered in honour of consecrated men and women speaks of them 'tasting on earth the gifts of the world to come'. This is a reference to the eschatological meaning of the religious life, that in giving up everything in order to follow Christ more closely, religious look also to the promise of eternal life which Jesus made to those who follow him in that way

(Matthew 19.28-29). The Kingdom of God is already here, in our midst, established in the death and resurrection of Jesus, and all Christians live already within its reach while waiting for it to be revealed plainly and fully. Religious consecration is a way in which that particular tension is made explicit. Consecrated men and women are people who live intensely the 'already but not yet' of the Christian life, citizens even now of the kingdom that is coming.

The universal call to holiness is the call to life in Christ, a life in the Spirit expressed in faith, hope and charity. This is what holiness means no matter the circumstances in which it is found. The brother is a living witness of this fundamental reality of life in Christ since it is all that he has.^{vii} He is 'only' a brother. Which means he is only a disciple of Jesus, only a son of the Heavenly Father, only a dwelling place of the Holy Spirit.^{viii} If we are sons and daughters of God then we are brothers and sisters to each other. Stripped of all the accoutrements of power and importance, function and significance, which cloud the vision of that fundamental reality even in the lives of many believers, the brother stands in the pure light of Christ's love. His presence in our communities is therefore analogous to the presence of the Church in the world.^{ix} Think, once again, of Martin de Porres, and of the many other consecrated men and women who have 'only' been Christians, just holy people in whom the kingdom of God is powerfully present.

¹ I thank Brother Joseph Trout OP of the province of Saint Albert in the United States for reading a draft of this article and for offering important corrections and valuable observations.

¹ The most recent comprehensive statement by the Holy See on the vocation of the brother can be found in *Identity and Mission of the Religious Brother in the Church*, Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, Vatican City, 2015.

¹ Note that this shift from function to being is characteristic of any ecclesiology based on the concept of the People of God. See, for example, Dario Vitali, in his book *Popolo di Dio* (Citadella Editrice, 2024), who writes as follows on this subject (my translation): 'There has been a radical change of logic, which privileges being over doing, Christian life over roles which, although necessary, are always secondary and at the service of the People of God' (p.8).

¹ Pope Francis, *Letter addressed to Fra Gerard Grancisco Timoner, O.P., Master General of the Order of Preachers for the eighth centenary of the death of St Dominic of Caleruega*, 24 May 2021

¹ Pope Benedict XVI, *Address on the theme 'Ecclesial Belonging and Pastoral Co-responsibility'*, 26 May 2009

¹ Pope John XXIII, Homily for the Canonisation of St Martin de Porres, 6 May 1962

¹ See Eliot's poem *Little Gidding* V.40-41 along with Luke 14.26-27,33

¹ See Vitali, op. cit., p. 130: 'the people of God come before the hierarchy, the theological life before roles and functions, common dignity before any difference in the ecclesial body'.

¹ Vitali, op. cit., p. 200: 'there is no greater title in the Church than to be children of God, and there is no greater task in the Church than to generate and nurture the life of God's children'.

¹ See *Lumen Gentium* 9

C. PROPOSED NEW VISION: MINISTERS OF MERCY AND COMPASSION: THE IDENTITY AND MISSION OF DOMINICAN COOPERATOR BROTHERS IN THE THIRD MILLENNIUM

MINISTERS OF MERCY AND COMPASSION: THE IDENTITY AND MISSION OF DOMINICAN COOPERATOR BROTHERS FOR THE THIRD MILLENNIUM

“Preaching is the substance of my life and my being.”
Yves Congar

THE BROTHER’S CALL

As followers of Christ and sons of St. Dominic, Dominican Brothers by their Solemn Profession, as men consecrated to the Word, are commissioned to enthusiastically proclaim the Gospel in every place and in every circumstance in the world where the Face of Jesus is dimmed or not yet known. With the same passionate spirit as expressed in the life and ministry of St. Dominic and his early brothers and sisters, as they encountered the culture of the day and evangelized it, today Dominican Brothers are uniquely called by name to catch the fire of the New Evangelization, go into world, illumine it, and to bring hope and healing to the world, especially to those living in the peripheries of human life, to talk about Jesus but to also show His Face as well.

The need for Dominican Brothers in the work of the New Evangelization in the universal Church is urgent. Preaching and the salvation of souls is the exclusive ministry assigned to the Order of Preachers since 1216. It is the principle ministry of Dominican Brothers but now in a new time and in a world in need of healing and hope. As we read in the Vatican Document, *“Identity and Mission of the Brother in the Church”*:

The vocation of the Brother is part of the answer that God gives to the absence of brotherhood which is wounding the world today. At the root of a Brother’s vocation lies a profound experience of solidarity that essentially matches that of Moses before the burning bush: he discovers himself as the eyes, ears and heart of God, the God who sees the oppression of his people, who hears their cry, feels their anguish and comes down to liberate them. In this intimate experience, the Brother hears the call: “Come, I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people out of Egypt.”

The Dominican Brother is an extraordinary treasure of the Church and absolutely essential in assuring the authentic fulfillment of our Order’s world-wide mission of evangelization as envisioned by our Holy Father, St. Dominic. The biographies of Dominican Friars are filled with rich and storied experiences of how they have taken God’s Word to millions of persons (including those with whom they live in community), some wounded, addicted and stigmatized, others unloved, unwanted and alienated or far from the faith, many living in desperate conditions, along the lines of brokenness and in places both far and near, and to those who death was imminent. It is not the work that defines the Dominican Brother; rather it is the prophetic and evangelical witness, the unfolding of the

mystery of their call to Dominican life that transforms lives, societies and cultures. The Acts of the General Chapter of Bien Hoa of 2019 emphasizes this prophetic witness when it stated:

*The cooperator brother is a prophetic witness to essential aspects of our common vocation as friar preachers. The fraternal character of our vocation is represented by the cooperator brother. He reminds us that our apostolic life, rooted in our Baptism and in our Religious Profession, is, in the first place, our way of living together. He reminds us that we are to create communities in which the Word is contemplated and mercy is shared. The brother makes an essential contribution to the particular character of our community life, strengthening it in fraternity mutual service and tenderness*²

BEARERS OF FRATERNAL LIFE

Dominican Brothers are consecrated men religious whose vocation is rooted in Baptism and Confirmation. Brothers are men who have freely, without condition or limitation, heard and responded to God's call to come preach with Him. In responding to this call, Brothers believe that the lived expression of the Dominican vocation, through the vows of obedience, poverty and chastity, is centered in, and radically dependent on a fraternal life devoted to prayer and liturgy, study, preaching and other ministries, and especially by caring for one another. As noted in the ACTS of the General Chapter of 1989, *"Our truly enculturated community life is our first preaching; it is a prophetic witness to and an authenticating sign of what we communicate by word of mouth."*³ As bearers of fraternal life, Brothers are centered at the very core of Dominican life and give witness and viability to the Holy Preaching, the ineradicable foundation for the Holy Preaching that will evangelize the world.

As men called to embrace Dominican life as non-ordained friars, Brothers are committed, courageous, free, happy and holy. As spiritual persons within the human experience, Brothers freely endure suffering and loss and willingly become vulnerable in their personal transformation and in their path to holiness in order to integrate and then to share the Gospel Message of healing with brothers in their community and then with the whole world.

The vocation of the Dominican Brother is centered in his universal call to holiness, and his mission within that call to bring himself, other brothers in his community, and all people into an intimate relationship with Jesus. This remarkable vocation, a mystery unfolding, provides a unique witness that all Dominican Friars are first consecrated religious bound together by their common religious profession, consecrated to the Word, and their commitment to the four pillars of Dominican life, namely, prayer, fraternal life,

² ACTS of the General Chapter of Bien Hoa (2019). Rome: Curia Generalita at S. Sabina, Chapter V, No. 189

³ ACTS of the General Chapter of Oakland (1989). Rome: Curia Generalita at S. Sabina, Chapter II, No. 3

study and preaching. It is their religious profession that makes the Friars full, unlimited and unrestricted inheritors of St. Dominic's vision and the charism of our Order, expressed in our contemporary world. All are brothers of our brother St. Dominic but called to different ministries.

PREACHERS OF MERCY AND COMPASSION

The identity of Dominican Brothers is actualized in their vocation by living the worldwide mission of the Friars of the Order of Preachers. The General Chapter of Bologna of 1998, as well as several earlier General Chapters, reiterated that the ministry of Dominican Brothers flows from their dignity as persons, and as Dominicans. The delegates reiterated the vital importance of the Brothers' identity and ministry in the Order. In the proceedings of the Chapter, the delegates stated unequivocally:

Since it is the whole community which preaches, the Order's mission and community life is weakened in the absence of our Brothers. Proclaiming the good news to people and in places that others cannot reach is the special charism of the Dominican Brother.⁴

The ministry of Dominican Brothers, conjoined with that of their priest-brothers, is the dynamic expression of St. Dominic's vision. It empowers Brothers to enter into the lives of people and travel to places wherever the Holy Preaching is desperately needed, especially where their priest-brothers have not yet entered. Their ministry is exciting, challenging and life-giving because it is imbued and driven by the power of God's Word. The Brothers' life-long commitment through the vows and regular observance, together with their various ministries cooperate with this Word to transform their own hearts and minds, as well as those of their brothers in community and all those to whom they are sent. Preaching from many pulpits, Brothers respond – not merely with words - but with the Word of God that lives in their hearts. Brothers can be found in ministry in many areas, for example, evangelization, education, research, fund-raising and development, management of Dominican facilities and community services, nursing and health care, health care ethics, retreat and social work, parish and pastoral ministries, caring for the poor and marginalized in our cities and in foreign lands.

Emphasizing the gifts and talents of the person, the ministry of the Brother is given full expression and lived out in response to the needs of his community and the Church. Dominican Brothers, like their priest brothers, are called by Divine Providence to be contemplative preachers in the Third Millennium and are, by profession, committed and obligated to the Holy Preaching, to one another and to the whole world.

Brothers of the Order share fully without limitations, the privilege and responsibility to announce the Kingdom of God to all those yearning for and needing His message of salvation in their lives. As Dominicans, with every breath, every action, every suffering,

⁴ *ACTS of the General Chapter of Bologna* (1988). Rome: Curia Generalita at S. Sabina, Chapter IV, No., 135, 2.

every joy, Brothers preach God's message of salvation, a message of hope, a message of enduring love for all persons.

DOMINICAN BROTHERS: A UNIQUE CALL FOR A PROPHETIC MISSION

In His love for the Church, in every age, Christ calls persons to take care of His people. Before time began Dominican Brothers are called to participate in the New Evangelization for this time, for this age, and for the world. Dominican Brothers respond to the radical call that evangelization evokes: to believe and then to proclaim that every person born into the world is worthy of respect and of unlimited love regardless of the reasons for their circumstances or their station in life. Dominican Brothers accept the radical call to open their hearts to those who seek healing and hope, to welcome the sick, the broken the abandoned, and the unloved in their darkest hour wherever they may be and wherever they call home. Responding to the call of Pope Francis, Dominican Brothers open their hearts and welcome those living on the outmost fringes of society, fringes which society has itself created; to welcome those into the human family whose voice has been drowned out by the humiliating indifference of others, and to heal these wounds through reaffirming their human dignity, freedom and promoting human flourishing.⁵

Dominican Brothers, impelled with the power and grace of the Eucharist, the Sacrament of Charity, “go forth into the whole world and proclaim the good news to all creation” (Mk 16:15). As witnesses and architects of the plan for unity which crowns human history in God's,⁶ Dominican Brothers freely bring to others the gifts of their presence and their lives vowed to the mission of evangelization through preaching. But the greatest gift Dominican Brothers are privileged to bring to others is the person of Jesus in the Eucharist, made flesh in each of them. This is the unique and treasured role that the whole Order serves in the *New Evangelization for the Transmission of the Christian Faith (NETF)*.⁷

As a fraternal community in mission, Dominican Brothers join with other members of the Dominican Family and proclaim God's message of salvation, a message of hope, a message of enduring love for one, and all those committed to their care with every breath, every action, every suffering, and every joy. As Jesus directed his apostles to “go forth into the whole world and proclaim the good news to all creation” (Mk 16:15), Dominican Brother must do the same.

As ministers of mercy and compassion, Dominican Brothers are called:

⁵ Pope Francis (2015). *Misericordiae Vultus: Bull of Indiction of the Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy*. Rome: Libreria Editrice Vaticana

⁶ John Paul II. (1996). *Vita Consecrata*. Washington: The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. No. 46.

⁷ Tenth General Ordinary Synod of Bishops. (2012). *The New Evangelization for the Transmission of the Christian Faith*. Rome: The Vatican.

- a. to care for one another in community, as their first preaching, and help create and then empower the Holy Preaching that will transform the world;
- b. to move with courage and daring ingenuity in bringing the Face of Jesus, the Face of Mercy, to those who are far from the faith, to those who do not know God and those who have lost hope;
- c. to create caring pathways and new bridges for those brothers and sisters who have been forced to live in a culture of waste to be welcomed to the human community and a common home where human dignity, freedom and human flourishing can be affirmed and protected;
- d. to collaborate with others to change systems of oppression that violate human dignity and crucify humanity;
- e. to redesign programs of formation, education and ministry that will welcome new vocations as well as focus on the development of ministers of mercy and compassion; and
- f. to have the courage and authentic commitment to journey with the least, the last and the lost, to listen to them, and accompany them as pilgrims of Calvary in search of healing, hope and the Resurrection.

Dominican Brothers share fully with their priest brothers, without limitations, the privilege and the responsibility to announce the Kingdom of God to all those yearning for and needing His message of salvation in their lives. Brothers preach God's message of salvation, a message of hope, a message of enduring love for one another and all those committed to their care with every breath, every action, every suffering, and every joy.

The Epistle of St. Paul to the Romans (*Rom 12:4-8*) captures the dignity and diversity of the identity and ministry of Dominican Brothers called to serve as ministers of mercy and compassion in the Third Millennium:

For as in one body we have parts, and all parts do not have the same function, so we, though many, are one body in Christ and individually parts of one another. Since we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us exercise them: if prophesy in proportion to the faith; if one is a teacher, in teaching; if one exhorts, in exhortation; if one contributes, in generosity; if one is over others, with diligence; if one does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness.

As men of faith and witnesses of hope and with courage and confidence in the *Digitus Dei*, Dominican Brothers do not come into this world alone; they did not come to Jesus alone as they sought mercy when they asked for it as they professed their vows; and they do not go alone to the peripheries of human life to bring Jesus to the lost, the least and the last among us. In this prophetic journey as Dominican Brothers of the Church we are reminded the words of St. John Paul II who wrote:

You have not only a glorious history to remember and to recount, but also a great history still to be accomplished! Look to the future, where the Spirit is sending in order to do even greater things.⁸

⁸ Ibid, *Vita Consecrata*, No. 110

In their prophetic journey of evangelization, Dominican Brothers, empowered by the charism of the Order and its mission, give life to the mandate of St. Paul in his letter to Timothy when he wrote:

I charge you in the presence of God and of Jesus Christ, who will judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and kingly power: proclaim the word; be persistent whether it is convenient inconvenient; convince, reprimand, encourage through all patience and teaching. For the time will come when people will not tolerate sound doctrine but, following their own desires and insatiable curiosity, will accumulate teachers and will stop listening to the truth and be diverted to myths. But you, be self-possessed in all circumstances; put up with hardship; perform the work of an evangelist; fulfill your ministry (2 Tim 4:2-5).

Now let Dominican Brothers come to Jesus, to rest, to contemplate the mystery unfolding in their midst and catch the fire of the New Evangelization. Preaching from many pulpits, Brothers respond - not merely with words - but with the Word of God that lives in their hearts.

D. DESCRIPTION OF A RENEWED MINISTERIAL FOCUS: *DOMINICAN COOPERATOR BROTHERS: CALLED TO SERVE AS MISSIONARIES AND DISCIPLES*

In his letter to the Master of the Order, *Praedicator Gratiae* Pope Francis writes: “In our own age, characterized by epochal changes and new challenges to the Church’s evangelizing mission, Dominic can thus serve as an inspiration to all the baptized, who are called, as missionary disciples: to reach every “periphery” of our world with the light of the Gospel and the merciful love of Christ; to cooperate with others to overcome unjust economic and political structures; and to give birth to a new world where all of us are brothers and sisters where there is room for all those whom our societies discard.” he calls all Dominicans to be in the forefront of a renewed proclamation of the Gospel, one that can speak to the hearts of the men and women of our time and awaken in them a thirst for the coming of Christ’s kingdom of holiness and peace.

Brother Gerard Francisco Timoner III, OP, Master of our Order, in elaborating on Pope Francis’ call to our Order states “Speaking either with God or about God, St. Dominic embodied a synergy of contemplation and action and exemplified a disciple-missionary, called to follow and sent to preach the way of the Gospel. It is worth pondering that the Holy Father uses the term missionary-disciple instead. Perhaps, Pope Francis is inviting us to realize that the God who sends us in mission is the same God who is present everywhere and constantly invites us to follow Him as disciples.”

The call of Pope Francis and the Master of our Order, to all Dominicans to serve as missionary-disciples, is a prophetic moment especially as the *Permanent Commission for the Vocation of the Dominican Cooperator brother* continues the work entrusted to it by the 2019 General Chapter of Bien Hoa (cf. *ACTA* 189-198). This act of the 2019 General Chapter was an historic event but, more importantly, it was a defining moment that re-affirmed the

essential presence of the vocation and ministry of Cooperator brothers in carrying out the mission and charism of our Order in our contemporary world.

As we move forward in creating a new vision and ministry for Dominican Cooperator brothers in our world, the Permanent Commission invites all brothers of our Provinces and Vicariates serving as Directors of Vocations and Formation to participate in this survey.

In this work, we are reminded of the invitation of Jesus *“let us cross to the other side”* (Mk: 4:35), and follow Him and his disciples as they travelled deep into pagan lands to announce the message of the kingdom, to be unafraid to cross all frontiers even to the ends of the earth, and to welcome to our common home the lost, the last, the least, the unloved, the unwanted, victims of bondage and human trafficking, and those forced to live on the periphery of human life in deafening anonymity. Amen^x

Proposed Formation for Dominican Life as a Cooperator brother

The aim of our formation is the making of a Dominican preacher, one who will be a preacher of grace and a true witness to Christ’ (Rome 2010, nn.185, 200). It requires an environment characterized by prayer, poverty and study, by apostolic zeal and a sense of mission, by joy in liturgical celebration and common life. Its success is measured by genuine personal maturity, the practice of prayer, fidelity to the vows, community life, continual study, solidarity with the poor and a passion for the salvation of souls.

Formation begins in the stages of initial formation and continues throughout our lives. This is why most of this information applies not just to initial formation but also to permanent formation. This single process of formation finds its unity in the purpose of the Order: the mission of preaching (Mexico 1992 n. 27,2). Initial formation introduces us, therefore, into something that characteristics the whole of our lives.

In our tradition formation means growing in discipleship as we follow Christ on the way of St Dominic. It is not just about academic study and it is not just about one period of our lives. It presupposes humility and docility, accepting that we need always to grow in knowledge and in virtue, to understand better, and to be renewed. Most deeply, of course, formation is the work of God’s grace.

Our formation will seek to integrate the intellectual and pastoral dimension in the human and spiritual development of the brothers (Pastores Dabo Vobis §§42-59). Many general chapters have emphasized that our formation seeks to help the brothers to become more mature as men and believers, as religious and preachers. Brothers preparing for priesthood need a particular initial formation in preparation for their vocation, as do the co-operator brothers in preparation for theirs.

Our formation must attend to these aspects because it is the formation of apostles, after the pattern of life devised by St Dominic. Its paradigm is the school of apostolic life in which Jesus is the Master. So our first text for formation is Sacred Scripture. Jesus trained the apostles as preachers of grace by inviting them to share his company and to learn from his words and actions. He taught them how to pray and initiated them into the mysteries of his person and of his mission. His final formation of them was through the gift of the Spirit who sustained in them their love for the Master and their desire to follow him. St Dominic

restored this school of apostolic life in view of his mission and we are called to live it in ways adapted to our time and circumstances.

We believe that we have been called by God to follow St Dominic and so to follow Christ in his preaching mission. We are called to grow into this mission by the Word of God, by the Church, and by our Constitutions. We are called also by the need of our brothers and sisters to whom we are sent to announce the Good News of salvation (cf. Trogir 2013 n.124). We are called especially by the poor, the blind, and the afflicted, by prisoners and offenders, by the oppressed and the marginalized (cf. Luke 4:18). All this urges us towards a permanent formation: the Word of God which abides in us, the studies which we pursue, the men and women we meet, the mentalities which challenge us, the places and events in which we are immersed.

Both Pope Francis and the Master of our Order, Brother Gerard, encourage us in our deliberations to center on the needs of the Church today. With that challenge before us, the Permanent Commission believes the time has arrived to design a program of renewal for the vocation and ministry for Dominican Cooperator brothers in the Church.

A. Programs of Recruitment and Promotion:

1. Programs will be promoted in Provinces, nationally and internationally;
2. Use of a variety of communication methods is essential, e.g. face-to-face meetings; retreats; virtual media is essential, e.g., paper; internet, etc.,

B. Institutional Formation: (*)

1. Novitiate: a common novitiate with clerical students;
2. Post-Novitiate: a common formation program with clerical students;
- * Consistent with the *Ratio Formationis Generalis & Ratio Formationis Particularis*

C. Ministry Formation Programs: (*)

1. Design of structured programs, i.e. learning strategies and outcomes that reflect the components in the letters of Pope Francis, and the Master of our Order;
2. Since not every Province has the resources to implement this new model, programs will welcome Brothers from other Province which encourages interprovincial cooperation (e.g. The Angelicum; Providence College; University Santo Thomas; Dominican School of Philosophy and Theology)
3. Not all formation programs will require academic credits or terminal degrees e.g. certifications; continuing education programs;
4. Scholarships and endowments need to be developed to support Cooperator brothers enrolled in these programs;
- * Consistent with the *Ratio Studiorum Generalis & Ratio Formtionis Particularis*

D. Supervision and Management of Renewal of the Ministry

1. Sponsoring Provinces, e.g. individual provinces or in collaboration with other provinces.

2. Accountable to the Permanent Commission and to the Socius for Fraternal Life and Formation.

E. Ministries: The following ministries are proposed:

1. Education: (e.g. elementary and high school; college/university; parish; campus ministries; RCIA)
2. Health Care: (e.g. pastoral care in multiple settings; health services; Clinical Pastoral Education; health care ethics)
3. Social Services: (e.g. advocacy services for the poor homeless elderly and persons of color and ethnic diversity; health care, housing and food services; caring for persons of color; minorities; victims/survivors of abused; victims of human trafficking and human rights violations)
4. Social Media, Communications and Collaboration: (i.e. preaching, evangelization and education through the use of technology; collaborating with other religious congregations and organizations in promoting the identity and ministries of Brothers for the Church);
5. Community Administration: (e.g. management of Dominican facilities and services; etc.)
6. Suggestions for Other Ministries:

SUMMARY

As Dominican Friars, a community in mission, we are preaching God's message of salvation, a message of hope, a message of enduring love for one another and all those committed to our care.

With a prophetic vision, let us not be hesitant to re-vision the vocation of the Cooperator brothers for ministry in the Third Millennium. Let us work in every way together to embrace and implement the call of the Holy Father, Pope Francis and Brother Gerard, Master of our Order, to be *Preachers of Grace* as missionaries and disciples. With courage and confidence in the *Digitus Dei*, bound together through our Solemn Profession in community and in mission, let us move quickly from protracted debates to definitive actions for the sake of the Gospel. Amen!

Both Pope Francis and the Master of our Order, Brother Gerard, encourage us in our deliberations to focus our attention on the urgent needs of the Church today and for the future. With that challenge before us, the Permanent Commission believes the time has arrived to design a new focused model for the vocation and ministry for Dominican Cooperator brothers in the Church.

As part of the deliberations in this study, the Commission invited all participants to offer comments on the proposed renewal: *Dominican Cooperator Brothers: Called to Serve as Missionaries and Disciples*.

K. FINAL REFLECTIONS

As we move forward in inviting men to discern their future in the Church as Dominican Cooperator Brothers, let us always remember that Jesus is calling all people to help Him in transforming our wounded world to a world of hope and an enduring peace where every person is loved. The implementation of the new vision and ministry of the Dominican Cooperator Brother that will emerge as we implement the recommendations of this seminal report, is essential if we are committed to joining Jesus' ministry.

*Prayer to St. MARTIN DE PORRES, O.P. FOR VOCATIONS
MINISTER OF MERCY AND COMPASSION
(1579-1639)*

*HE BROUGHT HEALING AND HOPE TO ALL PERSONS:
INFANTS AND CHILDREN, THE SICK, THE DYING, THE ABANDONED
THE UNWANTED. THE UNLOVED., THE WEALTHY, THE OLD,
THE DIFFERENTLY ABLED AND THE CONFUSED, THE ABUSED, THE HOMELESS,
THE POOR, THOSE IN BONDAGE, THE IMPRISONED, PERSONS OF COLOR
THOSE FAR FROM THE FAITH AND VICTIMS OF DISCRIMINATION.*

*RESPONDING TO A CALL TO FOLLOW JESUS MORE CLOSELY, HE RESPONDED TO GOD'S CALL TO
BECOME A DOMINICAN FRIAR. AS A DOMINICAN FRIAR HE WAS ASSIGNED THE MINISTRY OF
HEALING FOR THE FRIARS IN HIS COMMUNITY AND THEN FOR THE SICK, THE POOR, THE
UNWANTED AND UNLOVED IN LIMA, PERU.*

*EMPOWER ST. MARTIN TO ENCOURAGE MEN TO ACCEPT GOD'S INVITATION AND ANSWER HIS
CALL TO BECOME DOMINICAN COOPERATOR BROTHERS. AMEN*