“FOR WHERE TWO OR THREE ARE GATHERED TOGETHER IN MY NAME, THERE AM I IN THE MIDST OF THEM” (Mt 18: 20)

“LORD, IT IS GOOD THAT WE ARE HERE.” (Mt 17: 4)

COMMUNITY is the third pillar of the Dominican Order. A building, dependent on four pillars, will fall if one of the pillars is weak. Prayer, Study and Mission are usually present in our Dominican Chapters; however, sometimes Community is not taken seriously enough. Can you imagine a Contemplative Nun asking to be excused from the Convent for a week or two each month? The Prioress would question her vocation. Our Community consists in attending our monthly meetings faithfully. It is so important that we must schedule our busy lives around that meeting. We should want to attend and participate in Chapter meetings. Community is a wonderful and necessary thing as St. Dominic imagined it so many years ago.

COMMUNITY – What is it?

This is a question which has just as many answers as it has people trying to achieve it. In biology it is described as a group of interacting organisms sharing an environment. Sociology supplies us with over one hundred definitions. Think of the virtual communities which did not exist ten years ago. President Obama worked as a ‘Community Organizer’. Many join a Sorority, Kiwanis, Bridge Clubs, the American Legion or the Knights of Columbus in search of it. How often do you see a community of men who meet regularly at McDonald’s to solve the problems of the world?
In a 1986 study *Sense of Community* Macmillan and Chavis offered four criteria for a community:

1. **Membership** – There must be some rules for becoming and remaining a member;
2. **Influence** – Members influence each other and attempt to extend their influence beyond their community, if only to attract new members;
3. **Integration and fulfillment of needs** – This is the *raison d’etre* of the community and without it, the group will slowly fade away;
4. **Shared emotional connection** – This must build over time and will unite the members to remain involved and active.

Community comes from the Latin: *cum* – with and *munus* – gift. To come together in a group is a gift for the individual and the group itself; there is “strength in numbers” and “two heads are better than one”. Men and women are social animals, pack animals, who gravitate to one another and live together, seeking out one another. Witness the growth of ‘Coffee Houses’ where often people come together to work alone but in the proximity of others. Many elderly shop often just to get out of their houses and to be around other people.

**COMMUNITY HISTORY**

In history we could site many examples of communities from the Greek City-States to the Feudal communities which grew up around the Lord’s castle. The Jewish people have been a united community for five thousand years: “You shall be my people and I will be your God”. (Ez. 36: 28) In the time of Jesus the Essenes lived in a monastic community at Qumran (it is generally accepted) where centuries later their library was discovered.

St. John the Baptist founded a community of disciples who followed his teachings and practices. Jesus chose to found a small community of Apostles and a larger community of disciples and followers who accompanied Him. His Apostles were with Him day and night for three years. Later, after abandoning
Him, they came together with Mary and other disciples in a house where they received the Holy Spirit and a new community was born, the Church. Smaller communities were then formed by the Apostles throughout the Middle East and, thus, we have the followers of Matthew, John, Peter, etc. St. Paul made it his vocation to visit communities in Corinth, Antioch, Ephesus, etc.

The Church has always encouraged the founding and nurturing of communities as a way to spread the ‘Good News.’ The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (752) says, “In Christian usage, the word ‘church’ designates the liturgical assembly, but also the local community or the whole universal community of believers. These three meanings are inseparable. ‘The Church’ is the People that God gathers in the whole world. She exists in local communities and is made real as liturgical, above all a Eucharistic, assembly. She draws her life from the word and the Body of Christ and so herself becomes Christ’s Body.” And 807: “The Church is this Body of which Christ is the head: she lives from Him, in Him, and for Him; He lives with her and in her.” We belong to the greatest community on earth and are obligated to participate in its actions. “Each disciple of Christ has the obligation of spreading the faith to the best of his ability.” (Lumen Gentium 17)

“The faithful are called as individuals to exercise an apostolate in the various conditions of their life. They must, however, remember that man is social by nature and that it has been God’s pleasure to assemble those who believe in Christ and make of them the People of God, a single body.” (Apostolicam Actuositatem 18) In commenting on this Br. Ambrose Sigman O.P. writes, “…since man is a social creature, this calling [the apostolate] can be exercised in the context of a group or association”.

Pope John Paul II in “Christifideles Laici” (29) elaborates, “Church communion, already present and at work in the activities of the individual, finds its specific expression in the lay faithful’s working together in groups, that is, in activities done with others in the course of their responsible participation in the life and mission of the Church”. Throughout the history of the Church various groups have arisen and been approved by the Church to spread the ‘Good News’.
ST. DOMINIC

When St. Dominic began to form the Dominicans he was directed to choose a Rule that had already been approved. Being of late a Canon Regular he chose the Rule of St. Augustine. The latter wrote, “The main purpose for you having come together is to live harmoniously in your house, intent upon God in oneness of mind and heart”. (1:2) The Dominican fathers surrendered their priory to a group of nuns in Madrid in 1220 so that the nuns could begin community life. This probably occurred under the direction of St. Dominic who wrote to the nuns, “If until the present you have not had a place in which to live your religious life, now you can no longer be excused, because by the grace of God you have buildings suitable enough for living the religious life”. In 1228 the ‘Primitive Constitutions’ reflect these references: “Because a precept of our Rule commands us to have one heart and one mind in the Lord, it is fitting that we, who live under one rule and under the vow of one profession, be found uniform in the observance of canonical religious life, in order that the uniformity maintained in our external conduct may foster and indicate the unity which should be present interiorly in our hearts”. (Prologue) These thoughts have survived through the centuries and continue to inspire and lead us until this present day.

LAY DOMINICANS

The Lay Dominicans have existed, under various names, since the beginning of the Dominican Order. From the penitential movements surrounding St. Dominic, the first Rule promulgated in 1285, through the present Rule approved in 1987 we have been called ‘To Praise, To Bless, To Preach’. By virtue of our Baptism we, as disciples of Christ, have been made participants in the prophetic, priestly and royal office of Jesus Christ. We have assumed the apostolic obligation to preach Jesus’ ‘Good News’ to ourselves, our neighbor and to all to the best of our ability. Our Rule, which we know, love and follow states:
2. Some of these disciples of Christ, moved by the Holy Spirit to live a life according to the spirit and charism of St. Dominic, are incorporated into the Order according to their appropriate statutes.
3. Lay Dominicans are united in communities, and they constitute with other groups of the Order, one Family.
8. Lay Dominicans should strive, to the best of their ability, to live in true familial communion in accordance with the spirit of the Beatitudes in every circumstance...
15. The local community is the appropriate means for nourishing and developing each member’s dedication to his or her vocation...Faithful attendance demonstrates the fidelity of each member.

Our Guidelines further elaborate this latter point:

15.b. Regular attendance at meetings is of the utmost importance for all members. For those having made their final profession, regular attendance witnesses to their Dominican vocation. For those in the early stages of formation, their presence at meetings manifests their Dominican calling...Fidelity to one’s vocation through regular attendance at community meetings is of the utmost importance.

The primary truth in the spiritual life, *sine qua non*, is that all advancement is based on regularity. Whether you are seeking to improve your prayer life, your practice of charity, your patience, your steps into contemplation, you will only advance step by step with consistency and persistence. There is no other way. Even Jesus Christ took three years to achieve His goal of saving the world and after two thousand years we are still participating in this apostolic work with Him. Saints have become Saints by rising each day and trying to live a life in communion with Christ. Upon returning to Nazareth after the Temple incident, “Jesus *advanced* in wisdom and age and favor before God and man.” (Luke 2: 52)

This is why our Rule leads us to sanctification: it instructs us to be faithful in our prayer life, to persevere with our studies, to continue to preach and to build up our community by assiduously attending our Chapter Meetings. To live and
operate alone is obviously not the Dominican way of life. We are not hermits but social beings who benefit by the example we give and receive from our brothers and sisters. This is something that takes time to build but is a beautiful thing when it occurs. A true blessing! Community life is not always easy and often challenging but ultimately life-affirming.

COMMUNITY LIFE

“All members bear responsibility for contributing to the climate, creativity and content of community life. Each member receives back what he/she invests in the communal life of a Lay Dominican. Community life should be democratic and participatory.” (A Handbook for Lay Dominican Leadership, p.11) Here are some suggestions for making meetings **Dominican:**

- **PRAYER.** From St. Dominic the Dominicans have been devoted to the *Liturgy of the Hours*. For this traditional reason each meeting should include an Hour, depending on the time of day. In addition to tradition this prayer of the Church, the prayer of Christ, must have a salutary effect on each of us and the group. We need all the help that we can get. Especially recommended is the Office of Readings as it includes a reading from the Fathers of the Church. For years our communities have been encouraged to allow time for preaching (a reflection) on the the day’s relevant Scripture with feedback and discussion. We are an Order of Preachers.

- **STUDY.** Members should engage in study according to their stages. They should use the materials from the Provincial Formation Program with a variety of resources. Study is not spoonfed by the lecture method but is interactive. Participation is necessary. Study at home is necessary and encouraged.

- **MISSION.** Members are encouraged to perform a ministry, e.g. visiting the sick, teaching catechism, working in a soup kitchen,
helping in a parish, etc. If unable, they should pray for the Mission of the Church. In addition, each Chapter should have a chapter project in which all collaborate in some manner. Bring a non-perishable food item for the poor (a Dominican tradition) to your meeting.

- **COMMUNITY.** Refreshments and conversation encourage a collegial atmosphere of good cheer. Get to know each other. A yearly Day of Recollection is a must for fostering Dominican Spirituality. A good suggestion is to have a Christmas party for a relaxing and celebratory end to the year.

There must be a reason why “Community” has persisted through the centuries as a Dominican Pillar. It is necessary. It is good. It is a blessing.

CONTEMPLARI,

ET ALIIS

CONTEMPLATA.

VERITAS

LAUDARE-BENEDICERE-PRAEDICARE
“The Bologna Document” This should be read, studied and discussed as it is very well-known and an important document which officially integrated Lay Dominicans into the Order. Very important.

[SEE AND READ ATTACHED]

WEB 2.0-YOUTUBE

Fr. Joseph Alobaidi O.P. discusses Dominican life and Community:

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DjodybzLG4E

An inspiring video on what Community Life means to the Dominican Sisters:

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QR_Y72dJ2N0

You will like this video from the Irish Dominicans which illustrates in a modern fashion the melding of Community with Contemplation and the Active Life; very enjoyable (those Irish!):
The Bologna Document

On the Dominican Family

Rome, 1983

1. Prologue

God continually calls a people out of darkness into the light of the Good News of Jesus Christ. He has always called men and women to worship him and to proclaim his name. Dominic heard his call in the cry of the men and women of his time and brought them a message of hope and freedom. From the very beginning people followed in the footsteps of Dominic. Today Dominican men and women are attentive, as Dominic was, to the needs of our time.

The Church, the people of God, is open to the Gospel values wherever they are found and proclaims these values to the ends of the earth. The followers of Dominic, because of their diversity, are a microcosm of the Church, in the local community and throughout the world, fully engaged in spreading the Word of God. Faithful to the example of Christ and the vision of Dominic, we are open to the Spirit, continually calling the Church to make the risen Lord present in every age and culture.

2. Charism of Dominic

1. Dominic was a man of the Gospel in word and in deed. He had only one passion: to know and to experience the Word of God in truth and from this experience to announce the compassion of God to men and women.
2. The Word of God who became man in the womb of Mary now takes flesh in us, a Word contemplated, celebrated in joy, studied attentively, lived and announced as Good News.

Dominic was at the heart of the Church in the service of the world. He was sensitive to the Word spoken in the heart of every man and woman, especially those who were enslaved in misery and need. We share in that charism and his prophetic vision, proclaiming the Word that the Lord puts into our hearts.

Our apostolic way of life is continually renewed in dialogue with our brothers and sisters and challenged by the values of the Gospel. Dominic associated women with his mission, thus affirming their place in the Church and its mission. As his heirs we have the task of manifesting the equality and complementarity of men and women.

We are open to the world, celebrating the goodness of creation and encouraged to use our freedom and to develop the gifts God has given us.
3. Followers of Dominic

1. From the very beginning the charism of Dominic was realized in different groups. New forms are still emerging, but all find their roots in Dominic. He is their common father.

The first group to be called into existence by Dominic's preaching was the nuns. In the first stage they formed part of the Jesu Christi Praedicatio of which Dominic was the leader. After he had established an Order, the nuns became part of that Order. They were deeply rooted in Dominic's work of preaching by their totally contemplative way of life. The nuns retain their original relationship to the Order through their profession made to the Master of the Order, the successor of Dominic.

In 1215 Dominic founded his Order of Preaching Friars, whose purpose was summed up by Honorius III. *God has inspired you to embrace a life of poverty and regular observance and to devote yourselves to preaching the Word of God, making known the name of our Lord Jesus Christ through the world.* The friars comprise priests and brothers, forming a branch of the Dominican Family, under the Master.

From the beginning, groups of lay people associated themselves with the Order, some of whom committed themselves to its life and mission in a more integral way, either in fraternities or as Brothers and Sisters of Penance of Saint Dominic, with their own proper rule. The Dominican laity is directly under the authority of the Master.

In a similar way, there arose fraternities of priests who wished to be integrated into the life and charism of Dominic and his Order.

Over a period, especially in the nineteenth century, different congregations of sisters were formed, who by their mission shared directly in the Order's charism of preaching. Each congregation is independent, and profession incorporates the sisters into their congregation and the Order. In the twentieth century secular institutes sprang up. Their call to evangelization is by way of a presence to the world in which they live out their total gift of themselves to God. They make profession of counsels in the spirit of Dominic.
A phenomenon of our time is the emergence of groups of looser structures who look to Dominic and the Order for inspiration. These new groups, together with members of associations connected with the Order along with relatives, friends, and collaborators, belong to the Dominican Family in a broad sense.

2. Sharing in Dominic’s charism these various groups participate in the one Dominican vocation. In complementarity and mutual collaboration, these branches constitute the Dominican Family and realize their mission while respecting the autonomy and vocation proper to each.

The principle and sign of unity of the Dominican Family is the Master of the Order, successor of Saint Dominic, the one who grants aggregation to the Order, the one who outside the General Chapter guarantees and promotes fidelity to the spirit of Saint Dominic.

On the basis of their equality, the different branches discover their responsibility for one another. This care for one another is expressed by regional, national and international organizations. All of these serve to foster cooperation at the local level, which remains the most fundamental area of mission and unity.

4. Evangelization as Common Mission for the Kingdom

1. The members of the Dominican Family live out their baptismal commitment and their special Dominican charism. The particular mission we receive is the proclamation of the Word of God, above all by sharing, as Dominic did, God’s mercy as a sign of liberation.

   In the spirit of Dominic this Word is addressed to all, to the sinners, the destitute and the afflicted,¹ and is awaited especially by the poor, the blind, captives and those on the margins of society.

¹Cf. Blessed Jordan of Saxony, Lib. 12.
Preaching in the various forms as understood in the Dominican tradition, is the indispensable liberating force most needed in the contemporary world, and without it the command to spread the Kingdom cannot be fulfilled.

Open to the actual needs of the time we search for a path to young people and their world.

The Dominican Family, especially the Dominican Laity, show to its contemporaries the richness of an authentic apostolic lay spirituality.

2. The Dominican charism of preaching is continually nourished by the Word shared in community. Thus, in the proclamation of the Word of God the Dominican Family expresses a unity centered on the Word of God and seeks to give common witness to the Good News.

3. So that we might be effective preachers, we see ongoing formation as a central task. Our study is, above all, of the Word of God, but we must also seek to understand the world in which that Word is proclaimed. In a rapidly changing world, Dominicans listen to and welcome the Word of God already present in the cultures in which we live. We must also be in the vanguard in proclaiming the liberating Good News in diverse cultures.

5. Conclusion

The Dominican Family is present with a certain vitality in all five continents. We are united to one another by the deepest bonds of the Lord's love. We affirm our solidarity with all our suffering brothers and sisters, especially those who are persecuted for their fearless proclamation of the Gospel of peace and justice. Grounded in the profound peace of our common vocation we move full of hope into the future. We pray the Holy Spirit to renew in us the courage to continue in the footsteps of Dominic, speaking only to God and of God.