



Monialibus

Nuns of the Order of Preachers
International Bulletin

N° 37 October 2017

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Monialibus is the official International Bulletin of the Nuns of the Order of Preachers published by the International Commission of Nuns (ICNOP) twice a year in April and October. It is available at the website of the Order – www.op.org
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“With fraternal affection...”:

Dear Sisters,

Please receive my greetings with my joy of being able to share with all of you at this time.

As I have told you on other occasions, from time to time interesting topics of conversation arise during our breakfasts at Santa Sabina. On other occasions the subjects are more trivial.

A few days ago we talked about perfume, and the famous pharmacy (that is, a laboratory of perfumes), which was started many centuries ago by our Dominican brothers at the convent of Santa Maria Novella in Florence, Italy. Today it is in the hands of a private company that has opened exclusive stores throughout the world where they offer their famous and expensive perfume products. Some of you in our monasteries also develop exquisite perfumes, and they are more affordable than those mentioned above.

I suppose that for the development of a good perfume it is necessary to have good essential oil as its base. This matter of essences brings me to the subject I want to share with you at this time.

In my meetings with you, there frequently occurs the following question: What is the genuine fundamental essence of the Dominican contemplative life? Certainly, it is an appropriate and fundamental question. It seems easy to answer, and becomes complicated when we diversify the accents and emphases. This beautiful variety of intensities and nuances is completely lovely when lived in communion. It can contain the danger of confrontation which would never be desired among us.

I will try, dear Sisters, counting on your fraternal kindness, and even at the risk of being wrong, to offer to your consideration three essences that I understand cannot be lacking in the pleasing perfume of the contemplative Dominican life.

First: To be women of God. It is the constant and eager search in the Mystery of Love that gives this special mode of surrender to the Lord its solidity and consistency. Everything in our lives:

sacramental celebration, prayer, liturgy, study, meditation, schedules, even work and recreations, should be focused towards this goal. Any other motivation would detract from the gentle and attractive perfume that those who, above all, seek the Love of their soul and happily burn with the peace that only He can offer. Many times I have thought that the religious life must always be a living parable and eloquently illustrate the invitation of Psalm 34: “Taste and see the goodness of the Lord. Blessed is he who takes refuge in Him.”

Second: To be women of God who build fraternal communion. It can be no other way. Encountering the Mystery of God, Who is Love, we ceaselessly offer love for those who are at our side, especially when they are people who share the same goals and advance along the same paths. When insurmountable ruptures open up between us, deeper than the small frictions, slights or daily misunderstandings, we may wonder with what God we are meeting.

The woman and man of God, like St. Dominic of Guzman, cannot be other than truly fraternal and endearing to others. But if other realities other than the Lord have taken shape within the depths of our being, the risk of mutual estrangement, or the breaking of communion, is highly probable.

In the year 2000, then Vietnamese archbishop Francis Xavier Nguyen van Thuan preached the annual retreat to Pope St. John Paul II and his collaborators. He addressed the theme of communion, which is always so necessary for the Church’s interior life. He concluded by saying:

“Communion is a battle of every instant. Even one moment of neglect can shatter it; a trifle is enough; a single thought against charity, an obstinately held judgment, a sentimental attachment, a mistaken premise, ambition or personal interest, an action done for self and not for the Lord. ...

Help me, Lord, to examine myself like this: What is the center of my life: You or me? If it is You, let us meet in unity. But if I see that around me, little by little, everything moves away and disperses, it is a sign that I have put myself at the center.”

I have often thought that the religious life should always be a jubilant verification of the Lord Jesus Christ's desire that we be one; that it becomes reality between us and, through us, in the history of the human family which is so hostile and painfully broken. Dearest Sisters, let us make the words of Psalm 133 a reality: "How good and pleasant it is, when sisters love one another."

Third: To be women of God who build fraternal communion at the service of the Church, the Order and the great human family. It is at the heart of what St. Dominic de Guzmán left us. That perfect balance between seeking the Love of God and offering this love to all those we encounter on the journey, in communion with the Church and building up the Church.

Our mission is preaching from monastic contemplation. Contemplation is of the essence of our life. It makes us bearers of the Good News: the Love of the Father known to us in the Person of His Son, Jesus Christ the Lord. His Spirit within us, impels us to be this gift of love and generosity for the Church, for the mission of the Order and for all of humanity.

I would like to draw our attention to being especially attentive in taking this gift of love to young people. It is wonderful how you accomplish this in some monasteries.

We must strive with the effort it requires, to summon them, to invite them, and somehow, to have them close to our communities. We need to have them close to offer them, simply and convincingly, the path to the fullness of meaning, of existence, and a rich and joyful personal fulfillment that can be found in the contemplative life.

I have often thought that the religious life must always be a beautiful, ardent love letter to all humanity, realizing in life the words of St. John: "I am writing to you, fathers, because you know him who is from the beginning. I am writing to you, young men, because you are strong and have overcome the evil one. I write to you, dear children, because you know the Father." (1 Jn 2:13-14) With all of this, I believe that the essential will radiate from our monasteries, as a sweet aroma, exquisite and attractive precisely for those who seek Love and Fullness.

With brotherly affection,

Fr. César Valero Bajo, OP
Promoter General of the Nuns
Original: Spanish

ECHOES FROM THE REGIONS— NEW MEMBERS OF THE INTERNATIONAL COMMISSION

Sister Mary Rose Carlin, OP – North America

My name is Sister Mary Rose of Joy Carlin, O.P. I was born on October 25, 1978 in Lufkin, Texas, U.S.A. I am third in a family of ten children, the oldest of seven girls. I have two older brothers and one younger one as well as numerous aunts, uncles, cousins, nieces and nephews.



My first introduction to the Monastery of the Infant Jesus, of which I am a member, was as a few days old baby when my mother brought me here to meet the nuns. Although my parents were baptized Catholics, at the time of my birth they were attending a Baptist church. They had met at a Catholic university in California, and, to their dismay, watched their friends become atheists. (This was during the great societal and ecclesial upheavals of the '60s and '70s.) When my father set up a private practice in Lufkin as a family practitioner the nuns began going to him as his patients. They soon got the whole story out of him and started praying. Needless to say, they prayed my parents back into the Church, and I along with an older brother and two sisters, was baptized at the Monastery's Chapel on August 15, 1982 when I was three years old. I am forever grateful to the nuns for being the instrument through which God drew my family

back to the Church and I admire their fidelity during difficult times.

My mother was an elementary school teacher and she homeschooled the ten of us through primary and secondary school. I earned my degree, a Bachelor of Liberal Arts, at Magdalen College, now Northeast Catholic, in Warner, New Hampshire, U.S.A. This college follows a Great Books Program, its curriculum being based on the classics of Western and Eastern Civilization. Its classes are conducted according to the Socratic Method of Inquiry in a seminar style, a system of learning which I loved. After graduation, I worked for a year at the college as a bookkeeper and librarian as well as a student teacher of Theology (Christology 301 and Ecclesiology 302). It was during this year that a longing for the cloister, which I had felt in childhood, returned.

I entered the Monastery of the Infant Jesus in Lufkin, Texas, on June 11, 2000, the Feast of Pentecost that year, at the age of 21. I received the habit and began my novitiate on April 5, 2001. My first profession was March 29, 2003 and my solemn profession February 25, 2006. Since solemn profession I have served the community as assistant bursar, bursar, supervisor of work people and maintenance, and Novice Mistress. I am also serving a second term as councilor and secretary for the North American Association of Dominican Monasteries. In 2008 I helped to edit *Vocation in Black and White: Dominican Contemplative Nuns tell how God called them*, a collection of vocation stories from Dominican nuns throughout our region. Our association sponsored this project in honor of the 800th anniversary of the founding of the Dominican nuns.

I am very happy to serve on the International Commission of Nuns and look forward to meeting Dominican nuns from all over the world.

Sister Mary Rose, OP
Monastery of the Infant Jesus (Texas, USA)
Original: English

Sister Stanisława Pelechata OP – Europe Utriusque

My name is Sr Stanisława Pelechata OP. I would like to introduce myself briefly.

I was born on 17 October 1972 in Góra, in the western part of Poland. At present my closest family consists of my mother and an elder brother, as my father passed away in 2009.

Following my secondary education, I studied for an MA degree in English linguistics at the University of Poznań, Poland. I was also employed as a teacher of English for four years.

While living in Poznań, at first I kept away from the Church, holding many misconceptions about its doctrine. This was my attitude until I happened to see a TV program of ‘the Word for Sunday’ series. Two friars dressed in white, showing the Rublov’s icon of the Trinity, said the fourth place at the table was there waiting for me, for us, to take it. The reality behind those simple words spoke profoundly to my mind, to my heart and to my whole being. That was the beginning of the journey that still continues, and that, I hope, will reach its destination one day. I found our Dominican brothers and benefited greatly from their preaching as they helped me return to the faith and the sacraments. With time I felt a growing attraction to the Dominican monastic life. I did not realize at that time that my story had something in common with the story of our first sisters at Prouilhe.

I entered St Anna Monastery, Poland, on 29 September 1998. After a year of postulancy and a year of canonical novitiate, I made my first profession on 24 September 2000. Three years later I was admitted to solemn profession which I made on 28 September 2003.



I served my community as a cook for ten years, combining this duty with my translation work. In September 2014, I was appointed bursar. I still

hold that position. In 2008 I was elected a councillor and then re-elected for two more terms.

In 2007 I took responsibility for the Polish edition of the newsletter *Monialibus* and translated it regularly till 2013. In 2016, I resumed this task, coordinating a group of translators. On different occasions I was of service to the previous representatives of our Region in the ICN, Sr Breda Carroll OP and Sr Josefa Strettiová OP, helping in their communication with the Polish-speaking monasteries.

In 2008, I participated in the regional meeting at Strahlfeld, Germany. Then I was delegated to be part of the preparatory team for the two successive Euromon meetings in Krakow, in 2012 and 2015. At present I am engaged in the preparation of our next meeting planned for 2018.

I am grateful for the trust shown to me by many communities of my region and by the Master of the Order. While being aware of my limitations, I am willing to learn how I can be helpful in building and strengthening the ties of communion among our monasteries and with the whole Order.

Sr Stanisława Pelechata OP
St. Anna Monastery in Poland
Original: English

Sister Lioba Hil, OPl - France & French-speaking Switzerland

On May 24th, 2017 Friar Bruno Cadoré, Master of the Order, appointed me as a member of the International Commission of Nuns. Friar César informed me of my nomination during the evening of Holy Trinity Sunday: I took this as a special blessing for which I can only give thanks! With all my heart I am profoundly grateful for the confidence granted to me, which moves me greatly.

To be called with the other members of the ICN and Fr Cesar to work with Fr Bruno at the service of the monasteries fills me with joy. “My” region consists of all the monasteries of France and that of Estavayer-le-Lac in Switzerland.

The mission entrusted by the Order to the ICN is precious, subtle, and essential for the life and future of our monasteries. At the same time I admit I am rather anxious: will I be able to assume this mission, what will be required of me and the expectations that I will discover? But I am confident, I belong to a group of people who are pleased to serve the Order for the good of our communities of nuns. Therefore, the Lord will accept the tiny pebble of my contribution.

Who am I? I am German, aged 68 and have been a nun at Prouilhe for the past 31 years.

How did I get there?

« What do you ask? » – « God’s mercy and yours. »



When I heard this exchange during the profession of a friar—in Germany in October 1977: I was totally unaware that it was a profession that was taking place before my eyes!—I was profoundly moved and said to myself: “You must find out where this place can be found; the house where mercy abides!”

This is the key to my vocation! My interior quest finally led me during the summer of 1983 to visit the “holy Dominican places” in the south of France and right to Prouilhe where I knew no-one. When I arrived in front of the monastery and the church I was quite certain that “that was it!” An immense sensation of joy filled my heart—and yet I found it difficult to understand that the Lord seemed to call me to live in a country that was not mine, where the language spoken was not my mother tongue... and moreover to a monastery! I couldn’t believe it...

I continued my professional career as a mathematics, physics and religious education teacher in a Catholic secondary school in Germany—and in the end I embraced the call of the Lord to allow myself to be led to the life of a Dominican nun.

On September 13th, 1986, I entered the Monastery of Prouilhe and made profession on May 14th, 1989, the solemnity of Pentecost. I have the grace and joy to live in a community at the very source of the Order and to welcome Dominican Sisters and Brothers from all over the world. In the duties entrusted to me, I have tried to put into practice the heritage that Saint Dominic has left us as a real treasure: « He bore the afflicted in the inmost sanctuary of his compassion ».

*Sister Lioba Hill, OP
Prouilhe, France
Original: French*

Sister Lorena Barba Franco, OP – Mexico

I was born on August 13, 1975, in Rancho Los Dolores, municipality of Arandas Jalisco. We were ten children, five girls and five boys. I am the fourth. By the grace of God, we children are all still living; my father Ramon Barba is 72 and my mother Josefina Franco Orozco, died at 63, in 2013.

I completed primary and secondary studies in the bosom of my family; at home my life passed through both difficulties and joys. I consider that in the midst of economic need, God was sowing the seed of the vocation that was warmed by the never-failing warmth of the home.

On February 25, 1991, at 16 years old I entered the Dominican nuns' monastery of Saint Mary of Grace, in Guadalajara; after experiencing a few weeks, I was admitted to the postulancy on March 7 of the same year. In this stage the call was being clarified, with the help of my Sisters, especially of the elder Sisters, who showed me the excellent example of their dedication, and even more, their perseverance. On September 7, 1991, I received the habit of the Order and began the novitiate.

On January 16, 1992, by mandate of the Master of the Order, we gathered all the novices of the

different monasteries of the Republic, in the monastery of Saint Rose, Puebla, to begin the "Federal Novitiate", since the monasteries were now a Federation.



On October 8th of the same year, I professed my first temporary vows, and was immediately transferred to the House of Studies, in the Community of Santa Catalina, Mixcoac, in Mexico City. I spent three years in institutional formation. In 1995, I returned to my original community, the Monastery of Saint Mary of Grace, to prepare for my Solemn Profession; at this time I took preparatory courses in the open system (self-study). And on September 29, 1998, I made my Solemn Profession.

In this year we began to plan the studies of the Licentiate in Religious Science, supported by the Rector of the University del Valle de Atemajac, Fr. Santiago, who sent teachers to the Convent. Six sisters began the program in 1999; after several years, our joy overflowed when we concluded the degree. Everything is grace.

The offices that I have held in the monastery:

- Three years in the bakery shop, from 1999 to 2001.
- Eight years as promoter of vocations (I confess that this is one of my favorite assignments, since the young women's enthusiasm and energy were contagious); I began this duty in 1997.
- From 2001 to 2007 I worked as Postulant Mistress of the monastery. (Formation is a very enriching experience; one learns more

than the young women, but also it is very exhausting.)

- Just as I was finishing my term as Postulant Mistress, I was asked to help with the formation of the novices, who were again united in the Formation house, one house for all the monasteries, which houses the novices, those studying in temporary vows, the Mother General and the Formation Community. They are sisters from the various monasteries of Dominican Nuns. On January 8 of 2008, I began the work of accompanying the novices. This experience was significant, since the vocations came from different monasteries and I was trying to unify them through sharing the charism and all that the Order asks of us.
- From 2010 to 2016, I was asked to accompany the junior professed sisters; this service was for six years. Accompanying the sisters under temporary vows in the Formation Center, in the Formation community, I have liked more, since in this state the young women have a great zest for life and many dreams, and are creative. When this is channeled for a common good, the atmosphere is transformed.
- I returned to my Monastery on June 3, 2016 and on December 3 of the same year, I was elected to serve as prioress of my original monastery, Saint Mary of Grace, Guadalajara, Mexico. I know that this service is in no way easy, but grace does not abandon me, and I have the prayers of so many people interceding for me. May all be for the glory of God.
- As member of the International Commission of Nuns, representing all the Monasteries of the Federation of Mexico, Cuba and Nicaragua, in order to walk together, I ask our Holy Father Saint Dominic to convey all the riches that the Lord has bestowed on our Order and that I may be an effective bridge of communication with the desires of the Master General, through Fr. César Valero, Promoter General of the Nuns.

Sincerely,
Sister Lorena Barba, OP
Holy Mary of Grace Monastery, Mexico
Original: Spanish

Sister Ana María de Jesús Martos, OP – Bética, Spain

Dear Sisters: Sr. Immaculate Serrano asked me to write a small presentation for the periodical, *Monialibus*. So, obedient to my predecessor I gladly introduce myself.

My name is Sister Maria of Jesus Martos. I was born in Torredonjimeno, province of Jaén, Andalucía, in the south of Spain. I met the Order and Nuns through a friend who entered the same monastery two years before I did. She invited me to her Vestition and, although not really wanting to, I accompanied my mother on the very special day for my friend. At that time, I did not go much to Church, except when there was some event in the family or with acquaintances. After that Vestition, I don't know what happened inside me but everything changed... One of the things that got my attention the most was when I visited her. It was the nuns' joy and happiness, even though they were behind a "grill". The truth is that God uses everything "to touch the hearts" of those whom He wants to be His in a special way.



I entered the Monastery of Our Lady of Mercy in Torredonjimeno, my home town on May 2, 1980. My First Profession was on April 24, 1983, and my Solemn Profession on May 18, 1986.

Now after all those years of the consecrated life, I give thanks to God for all that He has done for me living by His side within the Order of Preachers as a contemplative Dominican nun, and carrying the message of grace and mercy, as did our Father Saint Dominic.

I thank my sisters for the confidence they have placed in me. I express gratitude to the Master of the Order of Preachers for the appointment as

new member of the International Commission of the Nuns. Since June 4, 2017, I represent my Federation of Our Lady of the Rosary, Bética Province, southern area of Spain, as the Federal Prioress. I thank God for giving me this new opportunity to serve my sisters and my Federation within the Order's mission.

Please pray for me. United always in the Lord and our Father St. Dominic,

Sister Ana María de Jesús Martos, OP

Monasterio Federal de Santa María de Gracia

Córdoba, Spain

Original: Spanish

ECHOES FROM THE COMMUNITIES:

Two weeks in Burundi: visiting the nuns at Rweza

In October 2016, fr. Benoît Delahaye op from the Priory of the Holy Name of Jesus at Lyon and I spent two weeks in Burundi visiting the community at Rweza in the province of Ngozi in the Burundi highlands.

The monastery of Our Lady of Peace at Rweza was founded in 1973 by Taulignan; some years previously this monastery had welcomed three sisters from Burundi after the foundation of a previous monastery at Mureke-Burundi had failed to take off. In 1988 the great majority of foreign missionaries were expelled from the country and the foundation process was accelerated. The monastery received its canonical erection at this time, despite the small number of sisters, and this young shoot continued to grow with tenacity. The link between our two communities has remained strong to this day, through much correspondence and some visits. Having now in each community arrived at a new generation following that of the foundresses, we wished to give a new impetus to this link by getting to know the reality of the daily life of the sisters. The last visit of Sr Marie Pascale, the foundress, had been in 2005; Rweza had visited Taulignan more recently in 2007 and 2015: the Jubilees of the Order provided the opportunity to invite two sisters on each occasion.

The visit was short but intense and also gave us the joy of getting to know the community of

friars at Bujumbura, which is also the house of studies for the vicariate of Rwanda/Burundi of the Province of Canada. We appreciated the kind hospitality, and also the chance to visit, on the way there and on the way back, some of the sights of the capital as well as Lake Tanganyika which borders the city.

The road to the monastery crosses first the Congo/Nile ridge, a mountain range on whose steep slopes banana and teas plantations flourish against the odds. There is also timber felling to produce charcoal, which is the principal fuel of the country.

Night had already fallen when we reached the monastery, and this enabled us to appreciate immediately the great benefit brought to the sisters by the arrival of electricity in 2014. The last few kilometres of our journey had been lit by the lamps in the little houses along the roadside. As soon as we arrived, we went to the chapel where the community joined us for Mass. Then, at other tables, we shared a festive meal of welcome.

There are currently seventeen sisters in the community at Rweza, of whom ten are in formation. To these must be added the five sisters who left in 2013 to make the foundation in Benin in the diocese of Dassa. Another sister is on loan to the monastery at Douala, Cameroon. The community is fervent and joyful, very close to the surrounding population. Around the monastery we were able to see the mud huts of families who eke out a meagre subsistence. The sisters share as much as they can. A plan to bring water to the monastery will profit the neighbors also.

The monastery's life is very simple and largely self sufficient thanks to its agriculture, a small candle making department, and soon hopefully altar bread baking. Providence naturally plays a role, especially as far as the renovation of the buildings is concerned; between 1998 and 2008 most of the original buildings have been replaced by larger more solid ones. It is now the guesthouse that is awaiting its turn to be rebuilt in order to provide adequate accommodation for the retreatants.

The closeness of the community to the people is in evidence in the way they face difficult times together; during the last great crisis that shook the country between 1993 and 2000 there were many massacres, and the community took care to

protect its unity when divisions between Hutus



and Tutsis (the two principal ethnicities of the country) were rife. They would listen to the news together or just sit in silence when the suffering was too great. Now prayer for their country remains ever present as they hope that the latest political crisis can be settled peacefully.

In 2013, at the request of the Dominican friars in Benin and the Bishop of Dassa who donated a piece of land, four sisters left to make a foundation at Soclogbo. They were soon joined by a fifth sister. Today the guesthouse is already completed, and the chapel is under construction. The building for the sisters will follow. Providence will see to the rest. The Dominican family gathered at the new foundation soon after the guesthouse was finished. A novice for this young community at Soclogbo is already in formation at Rweza.

During our stay we were able to enjoy a community excursion to a lake in the north of the country, near to the border with Rwanda. A small bus borrowed from the diocese took us, together with the community chaplain, to the shores of Lake Cohoha. On the way we made a detour to visit a parish church, the fifth in the country in chronological order; it recently celebrated its centenary. Burundi is a young Christian country but enlivened by many fervent communities where vocations to religious life and the priesthood abound. It is said that these are favored by the political crisis as many see a spiritual solution as the only way forward.

It was with grateful thanksgiving that the two French travellers left this attractive country with

its hospitable brothers and sisters to return to their own communities. Doubtless further journeys in the future will continue to foster these fraternal relations.

*Sr Marie Madeleine, OP
Monastère de la Clarté Notre-Dame
Taulignan (France)
Original: French*

[Editor: In our Fall 2016 edition, we had a picture of this Holy Door; now we can add the story.]

The Holy Door of Mercy at Rweza, Burundi

On 28th August 2016, Mgr Gervais Banshimiyubusa, bishop of our diocese of Ngozi, opened the Holy Door of Mercy at our Monastery of Our Lady of Peace at Rweza, thus making our monastery a place of pilgrimage. He had sent us his chancellor to explain the procedure for the ceremony, and as preparation for it we had an 8-day retreat; we also informed our neighborhood about it. The Mass began at 10:30 am with an introductory rite, followed by a procession from the chaplain's house as far as the chapel door, which was closed. After an appropriate prayer, the bishop opened the door, blessed some water and sprinkled it over the assembled crowd as a sign of purification. After the incensing of the altar and the *Gloria*, the Mass followed its usual course accompanied by St Mary's choir.

In his homily, the bishop stressed the mercy of the Father, as evidenced in the Word made flesh

who lived amongst us... It is divine mercy that maintains the universe in being.



Before the final blessing, the bishop explained why we were holding this ceremony and the benefit to those pilgrims, the enclosed nuns and the sick and handicapped who are unable to travel as far as the cathedral. It would also benefit those who make a retreat at the monastery. Before coming to celebrate the Mass, Monsignor visited our three sisters who are hospitalized in Kiremba, to open the door of mercy for them too, thereby revealing the heart of a true pastor.

Let us all share in the joy given to us by the Lord in this jubilee year of 800 years of our Order and also the Jubilee Year of Mercy, and let us all praise him together for his love is eternal.

*Your sisters of Rweza-Burundi
Original: French*

A Wandering Monastery Has Found A “Home”—Sharing an Experience!

For several years our community’s life has been marked by the need to find a new place to live. Dreams, hopes, disappointments, expectations have set the rhythm of our progress, bringing us new experiences which we would like to share with you all.

We are all accustomed to thinking about a “home” small or large as it may be. But until a few months before the start of our foundation (1999) we did not know where we would be able to live, and this precariousness has always been with us: we started off in an uninhabited kindergarten-orphanage (where we lived for two years) and then moved to part of a Visitation monastery (three years), until at last we were given a house which, to this day, is the seat of our monastery, the place where our community has been able to put down roots and experience a little stability. What can we say? Providence has always found a roof over our heads! So a characteristic of our community’s progress has, from the beginning been itinerancy – both interior, of course, and also concrete.



The Hebrew term used to indicate a house is the second letter of the Hebrew alphabet, *bet*, which looks like a squared “c” turned upside-down: three walls and an opening, a way in and out. As we developed our community Project, one of the elements with which we wanted to express the physiognomy of our community was hospitality. Over the years the community has welcomed individuals or small groups who wanted to spend some time in prayer with us. This demanding, enriching task has year by year shown us all too clearly that there was not enough space in our house, either for the life of the community – which has been enriched by two young vocations, so that now there are seven of us – or for welcoming visitors.

What were we to do? With the help of the Bishop of Turin and his Vicar for consecrated life, we sought alternatives to our “cottage”, but everything was far too expensive for us, impossible to consider.

Then one evening in September 2014 the Bishop of a Diocese in Calabria (South Italy) called us: they were building a monastery in which a monastic community had been supposed to live, but they had unexpectedly withdrawn. So the Diocese had a monastery, but no nuns. By that

divine “chance” that leads history, the Bishop had heard about our search.

For those who are not familiar with Italy: we Italians say that it’s *long*! The distance between us and the Diocese in Calabria is 1200 km [tr: 745+ miles], but still more importantly there are cultural and religious differences between the north of Italy where we live, and the south.

After a series of telephone conversations, we made up our minds to go and see the place. That was a new identity for us: the *flying* community! What we came upon was extraordinary: the Bishop, some priests and religious and also lay people welcomed us and shared their wish to have us with them, their passion for proclaiming the Gospel and for seeking and building up the common good with all the social forces. The impact with this territory and its people, the social and church problems and all the values that typify them made our hearts burn with the passion of St Dominic for mission. We were overwhelmed!

Our visit to the monastery being built, immediately brought to light a problem: it is an enormous building with eight hectares [tr: 20 acres] of woodland. Unfortunately, in an area still gravely marked by the presence of the Mafia, we realised that our insufficient financial independence might lead us into serious difficulty. Community meetings and Chapters, reflection and prayer marked the period of discernment during which we were aware of the action of the Spirit, who led us all to greater unity, maturity, understanding the meaning of mission, and in the end we reached the sad decision that we must give up this project which had so deeply involved us. We confess openly: a little bit of our hearts has remained in that area, and the friendship that binds us today to some of the people we met there is a gift that we treasure. Nor was this the only gift. Encountering such a poor church reality that was yet rich in values and thirsting for the Word of God, having the wonderful experience of being expected and welcomed by a Diocese that told us they wanted to collaborate with us in our mission – all this radically changed our criteria in our search. We were aware that now our attention was focused not on the need (which still exists!) to look for a home, but on the desire to listen in order to understand where to answer a mission.

Providence intervened once more through Cardinal Severino Poletto, who had welcomed us into the Diocese of Turin in 1999. On the occasion of a simple good wish for the Day of Prayer for contemplative life (21 November 2015), we told him of our experience and of the wish in our hearts. He put us in touch with the Bishop of the Diocese of Casale Monferrato (Piedmont), a diocese poor in priests, in religious presences and in... hard cash.

After the first meeting when we shared our respective wishes and expectations, the Bishop of Casale told us that he hoped to see us become part of the church fabric of his Diocese. Together we prepared a “Pastoral project” describing the meaning of our presence: a prayerful presence, of women who, living the passion and compassion of St Dominic, try to allow themselves to be moulded by the Word in order to be able to share it and offer to those who approach us liturgy, *lectio divina*, spiritual encounters or just a welcome for any one seeking a space of silence and reflection.

And what about the house? The Bishop suggested that the seat of our monastery could be a building divided into two structures close to the Sanctuary of the Madonna of Crea, where pilgrims go from Piedmont and nearby Regions. One of these structures, the smaller one, which would be the guest house, has already been rebuilt; the other, which will become the seat of the actual monastery, needs to be totally rebuilt and is in dreadful condition.

Work on this second part should have been begun already, but the Diocese had financial problems that slowed the whole process, to the point where we almost doubted whether we would be able to set the project of our removal in motion. For most of the cost of rebuilding falls on the local Church (but we will do all we can to find financing personally).

At this point, we felt the need for further discernment. We asked ourselves what we were looking for: the security of a perfectly ordered, functional home, or could we be free to choose to respond to the call to a mission that we had felt was ours, poor among the poor, in the service of the Church?

After a period of fear, reflection and exchanges of ideas, with the greatest joy we repeated our “yes”, aware of the risk, but sure nonetheless that the Lord will walk with us. We will move into

the part that can already be used, responding in this way to the expectations of so many people who keep asking the Rector of the Sanctuary: “When will the Sisters arrive?”



So at this moment, there is only the “missing wall” of our future home: the wall that will open up to welcome people. And as for the other walls of the *bet* – well, that’s in God’s hands!

This process has involved the whole of our community. Starting from the first experience in Calabria, we also wanted our young sisters to go, see and then share their thoughts in the Chapter: whatever the decision, we felt that we had to reach it unanimously, and this was the case for Crea, too.



With our community’s unity, the Lord has given us the experience of a powerful, rich fraternity with other Italian monasteries who have shared their own experiences with us, ready to help us in our reflections: we are so very grateful to these sisters of ours!

We shared each step of the way with fr. Giuseppe Sabato, Vicar of the Master for the Italian monasteries, who supported and encouraged us: it was a joy to go see our future residence with him.



Here it is worth sharing two details that struck us at once. The first will be readily understood by those sisters (and brothers) who have had the opportunity to visit Caleruega: the views from Dominic’s native town and from our new monastery seem to have something in common! The second is the presence of the Virgin who is accompanying us: both in Calabria and in Casale, the place suggested to our community was and is close to a Sanctuary dedicated to her.

And so our progress continues, and for this reason we trust in the prayers and affection, of the nuns and of the whole Dominican Family that our poor little community may become, as the Master Br Bruno wrote, a “*sacrament* of the friendly conversation of God with humanity”.

Our monastery bears the name of Mary of Magdala, the first to be sent forth by the Resurrected Lord, set on her way by him, to proclaim the good news to the brothers and sisters: is this, perhaps, why we are still on the road?

Monastery Mary of Magdala – Moncalieri, Italy
Original: Italian

Saint-Catherine of Siena Monastery in Langeac (France)

The monastery of Saint Catherine of Siena was established during the movement of spiritual revival between the end of the 16th century and the 17th century. It was the preaching of a Capuchin monk, Théodose de Bergame on the Rosary that inspired four women from Langeac to found a Dominican monastery in their town, with the support of the town authorities and the population. The monastery of Saint Catherine in Puy-en-Velay accepted to support the foundation by lending three nuns. Consequently, on

September 24th, 1623 a small group of eight women moved into the newly constructed buildings. Among them was young Agnès Galand, who was to become Sr Agnès de Jésus – known as Mother Agnès by the local population – who was beatified in 1994. Our community is still influenced by her discreet, yet strong personality.



Agnès (1602-1634) was born in Puy-en-Velay, and from an early age her piety and mystical life were apparent. When she was young, she was also close to the poor and in particular devoted herself to care for pregnant women and young mothers. In 1631 during her term as prioress of Langeac, the Virgin Mary asked her in a vision to pray for a young unknown priest, Jean-Jacques Olier. When they finally met, three years



later, Mother Agnès encouraged and guided his mystical life. “I want you to be contemplative within your call to priesthood”, Christ was to have said to this priest of Pébrac. The Society of Saint-Sulpice that he founded to train priests a few years later was to bear the mark that the founder admitted to have received from Agnès. Since his beatification, there is increased interest

in Sister Agnès de Jésus and many pilgrims come to pray near her body which rests in our chapel. Couples who wish to conceive a child request her intercession as in the case of pregnancies with problems. The community is very keen to maintain her tradition by faithfully praying for priests and their training. Our links with the Society of Saint-Sulpice are still strong and alive. Today we are 19 sisters, 16 within the community and three in a retirement home.

Printing, book-binding, a small shop and a guest-house are our main activities. We opened a new guesthouse in August 2016 in an unused farm building, in order to improve our response to the expectations of the diocese and the region, where there are too few structures of this type. Indeed, we do not lack requests for accommodation!

Our monastery is located on the edge of Langeac, and is very closely linked with the parish, the priests of which celebrate Mass for us. A society of friends, set up in 2013 has developed fast. There are now about 200 members and they are a precious help in spreading interest in the monastery and are a real support in many fields. Among other actions, they were closely involved in the creation of a footpath “In the steps of Agnès de Langeac” between Le Puy and Langeac, which will be opened at the beginning of the summer.

Since 2009, we are pleased to have the friars of Clermont-Ferrand near us, as well as a Dominican fraternity very near to the monastery. Our “joint history” closely links us with the Dominican sisters of Le Puy, which also maintains a link with Agnès. The sisters continue to perpetuate her spirit in their apostolic way of life. One of their communities is established in the birthplace of Agnès as well as a school which they manage. There are also a number of small groups linked to the monastery (silent prayer, Hebrew, biblical and oecumenical groups) as well as many people in need of a hearing ear and compassion.

Like many other monasteries in France and even Norway or French-speaking Switzerland, the monastery is part of the Federation of Our Lady of Preachers. This dynamic structure enables us

to meet and to reflect together, and through the



teaching of Dominic, the monasteries support and help each other to respond favourably to their vocation in the context of the questions of our time.

Sr Christiane Dominique
Monastère Ste-Catherine de Langeac
Original : French

The Monastery of St. Dominic – Cochabamba, Bolivia

On May 5, 2017, the inauguration and blessing of our Church-Monastery took place in Cochabamba, Bolivia. As the bishop said in his homily, the Church-Monastery is modern, yet simple. It is shaped in an “L”. Christ Crucified presides from the central altar. To the sides of the altar are images of St. Dominic and Our Lady of the Rosary, who carries in her hands the Pilgrim Rosary that we received during the Jubilee of the Order from the Monastery of Farmington Hills, Michigan (USA).

The ceremony began at 4 p.m., presided over by Archbishop of Cochabamba, Msgr. Aparicio Céspedes: as well as Fr. César Valero Bajo OP, Promotor General for the Nuns: Fr. Jimmy Caballero OP, Vice-Provincial of the Dominican Vice-Province in Bolivia: Mother Rosa Luz Manrique Díaz OP, Federal Prioress of Our Lady of the Rosary Federation in Perú; Mother Rosa Elvira Cáceres Marroquín OP, Prioress of St. Catherine of Arequipa Monastery in Perú; and Prioress of this Monastery of St. Dominic. In addition, there were friars of the Province of St.

John the Baptist of Perú; nuns of the Federation of Perú; cooperators brothers of the Vice-Province of Bolivia; old people, friends, benefactors and those close to our Monastery.

It was a very emotional ceremony. Everyone was moved when Sister Eliana, Vicareess of the Monastery, said a few words of welcome to those who were present. She told the story of the Sisters arriving in Bolivia, looking for and buying the land, remodeling the place, and enlarging the buildings to accommodate us and enable us to live here. At the beginning, we lived in a house near the city that belonged to the Dominican Fathers, but they most generously gave it to us. All of this initial remodeling and enlargement was done for us with the unconditional support of our Order.

We had a project in three phases: Church / Sacristy; Monastery cells / Guest House and extern areas. We chose to do the entire project gradually, together, and with time and a definite design. It was, then, that we began with the Church. For this we used the services of Cardona-Ríos Builders. The engineer, Arturo Cardona Ríos, was in charge.

In the middle of June 2016, we began the work on the Church. All of the economic support will be borne by the Monastery of St. Catherine of Arequipa, Perú. After Sister Eliana concluded speaking, we gave thanks to God for having brought us to that moment.

Then, using a ritual prepared for the occasion, we processed to the new Church. The procession was led by Crucifix, with the respective candle bearers, followed by Mother Rosa Elvira (prioress of this monastery), Sr. Eliana (vicareess of this monastery), then followed by the rest of the nuns, faithful, friars and finally, our Bishop.

The procession began with the singing of, “I rejoiced when they said to me, Let us go to the House of the Lord.” When we reached the entrance door of the Church which was closed, Mother Rosa Elvira, as prioress, and Sr. Eliana, as vicareess of the community, made a significant gesture of opening the door. The closed doors of the Church opened, calling a great deal of attention to the new Church. This was the first time that the Church had welcomed all the faithful, as well as being the first time to have the Eucharist celebrated there.

The first gesture that the Bishop made when he arrived in the sanctuary was to sprinkle holy

water upon the people and the walls of the Church. The Liturgy of the Word followed this. At the end of his homily, the Bishop expressed his surprise at the presence of so many friars and nuns of our Order and the great variety of our international Dominican Family. He emphasized the beauty of the Church as a work of architecture and modernity, but beyond all that, he said it was the Spirit of God Who is Beauty, Who is Love.

“To combine progress and modernity, gives place to beauty dedicated to God; but even more important than this, it is what we have inside. It is the persons. We are temples of the Spirit of God... [We are] the house of God. God dwells in our hearts. We live in peace. We live well and so proclaim and are transparent to Jesus Christ.”



Closing ceremony of the Jubilee of the Monastery of Estavayer – Switzerland

We offer you, as lectio divina, this meditation on the presence of God in time that fr. Jean-Michel Poffet, ex-director of the Ecole Biblique (Biblical School) of Jérusalem, gave at the closing ceremony of the jubilee of the 700 years of the monastery of Estavayer on August 15th, 2017.

Dear sisters, you have an impressive past: 700 years of uninterrupted daily fidelity. A past made of grandeur but also at times of vulnerability—I seem to recall that in the time of the plague there were only three sisters left. But the faithfulness of the Lord and your courage have helped you overcome all the difficult times and come to this day. You have a long past, that is obvious, and you have abundantly celebrated it all this year, supported by the friends of the monastery to whom you owe so much, and by many brothers and sisters who have come to express their love and their faith.

But, dear sisters, do you have a future? You sometimes ask yourselves this question, with a bit of anxiety, and so do we with you, for you, and for ourselves, your Dominican brothers here in Switzerland. The disciples also questioned Jesus about the future: When would he establish

his kingdom, for example, and bring about the Gospel. And Jesus immediately diverted their attention from this type of curiosity to turn them towards the present: “It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has fixed by his own authority. But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth.” (Acts 1:7-8) To the ends of the earth... so as far as Estavayer!

So the only thing that really matters is to open our present to the coming Lord. Remember the beginning of the book of Revelation: “Grace to you and peace from him who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven spirits who are before his throne, and from Jesus Christ the faithful witness” (1:4-5)

Not only the God who is, nor the One who was or who will be (according to some Jewish commentators meditating on the revelation at the burning bush) but the One who is to come, who comes every day and turns towards us his face and his tenderness, who spoke to us in Jesus and who gives us his Spirit.



It is “God’s today”, the day that liturgy opens to his presence every day, as in the time of Jesus: “Today a Savior has been born to you (Christmas); today salvation has entered into this house (Zacchaeus); today, you will be with me in Paradise (the good thief)”.

Remember above all the great promise that closes the seven letters to the churches of Asia Minor and that Christ addresses to us today still: “Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if any one hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me” (Rev 3:20).

The daily Eucharist that you have celebrated here for 700 years, day after day, opens our uncertain time to the eternity of God, to his presence of friendship and comfort.

There is one condition, however: that we hear the voice of the Beloved who knocks on the door. Let us pray together so that in our families, our parishes, the church of this city, of this diocese and of this country, our ears be more fine-tuned to hear this discreet demand of the One who, without ever forcing the door open, stayed with the disciples of Emmaus and transformed for them a hearty meal into a Eucharistic gift.

May Christ accompany you with his Spirit and may Our Lady intercede for you. «*Ad multos annos*», my dear sisters!

fr. Jean-Michel Poffet OP
Original: French



Monastery of St Catherine of Siena and St Ann in Puebla de los Angeles, México, 1568–2018

In America, the Monastery of St. Catherine of Siena and St. Ann in Puebla de los Angeles is the first in the city, founded in 1556. The neighbors

recognize the seriousness of this religious experience and support and respect the nuns. They are under the spiritual guidance of the prior of the convent of Santo Domingo, Fray Juan de Alcázar.

María de la Cruz Monnegro, widow of Francisco Márquez, and foundress, sought the Holy

Father's blessing, the Bull of Foundation. Through the intervention of Cardinal Charles Borromeo, the mentioned Apostolic Letters arrived in Puebla on November 1567, and the official erection of the Monastery was held on January 10, 1568. The bishop of the then Diocese Tlaxcala was D. Fernando de Villagómez, the Pope was Pius V, and the King Philip II. The monastery was strongly united until the 16th century. Thanks to its stability it could establish the following monasteries: St. Mary of Grace in Guadalajara, Jalisco, 1588; Immaculate Conception, Puebla, 1593; St. Catherine of Siena, Morelia, Michoacán, 1595; and finally, in 1626, St. Agnes of Montepulciano in the same city of Puebla.

The first century of its foundation is beautifully narrated in the first book of Professions. In this period 308 had entered; 268 were choir nuns and 40 lay sisters. The first century was celebrated with Mass and a sermon preached by Rev. Fr. Master Mateo de la Cruz, asesor for the Holy Office. Doctor Alonso de Otamendi, sang the Mass. He was from the cathedral and assistant to the illustrious lord, Don Diego Osorio Escobar y Llamas, Bishop of Puebla de los Ángeles of the Counsel of His Majesty. The prioress was Mother Prioress María de San Marcos. Also two bells were presented. This account is found in the first Book of Professions.

Important events occurred such as: The miracle of the Holy Virgin of Guadalupe in the person of Mother Jacinta María de San José, on December 12, 1755. The problem of arranging the common life, which was a famous conflict among the monasteries of calced nuns in the city of Puebla who lived during the time of Bishop Francisco Fabián y Fuero between 1765–1772. The hardships that happened with the wars for Independence were concluded with the Laws of reform imposed by the President of Mexico, Benito Juárez, in 1859. The Laws went into effect in February 1861, and the monastery lost half of its property. With four times of calm and then persecution, they always returned to buy back their property and to occupy it again.

In 1919, the community was reduced to four old and sick Sisters. In these circumstances, Archbishop Enrique Sánchez Paredes went to the Monastery of St. Rose of Lima of the same city and Order, to request reinforcements. Three

Sisters responded to the petition: Mother María del Rosario Josefa of our father St. Dominic, Prioress; Sr María Concepción Josefa of the Heart of Jesus, Mistress of Novices, and Sr María Isabel of St. John Nepomucene, Procurator. They arrived at the monastery on February 1, 1920. Thanks to them the community revived and new vocations entered. Within 17 years, they had a community of 15; although on April 23, 1934 the completely lost the ancient monastery. Fortunately when Mother Rosario returned to her monastery of St. Rose in 1837, the Community had already found lodging in a house at Oriente 3, under Mother Guadalupe of the Good Shepherd, Mistress, Musician and Latinist.

To celebrate the 4th centenary in 1968, the Community met in the old Convent at 3 Oriente, with 16 nuns. These Sisters looked for a more appropriate place because the old Convent was unhealthy and prevented them from receiving new vocations. They bought the old "Angel House" in the Analco Barrio. The first stone was placed on May 15, 1967, Mother María de la Paz was the Prioress. The Sisters charged with the construction were: Mother Concepción Aguilar and Margarita Cayetana, but their resources were used up, and the "Catherines" were helped by a frair, a Cuban Dominican, Fr. Francisco Villaverde. He searched for help, and found it from the German Society *Adveniat*.

The feast of the inauguration of the new building was on October 4, presided over by the Archbishop of Puebla Octaviano Márquez y Torí. This was the best gift that Our Lord gave us for our 4th centenary. A legacy left to us by the older sisters, fruit of their efforts, service and generosity.

Of this group remain our dear mothers Margarita Cayetana and María of St. Dominic. The community now joins Sr. Maximina of the Child Jesus, the current prioress, in preparing for the 450 years of our foundation. Thanks be to God and to you, family, friends and benefactors, who have made possible our presence in the Puebla de los Ángeles, México.

*Sr María de Cristo Santos Morales OP
Puebla, México
Original: Spanish*



The current Community with Fr. Leobardo, Prior of the Convent of St. Dominic.