



Monialibus

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Special Edition



FOUNDATIONS



CONTENTS

Letter of Fr. Manuel Merten, OP

**Information and Day of Thanksgiving
At Prouilhe: February 2nd 2004**

**General Chapter of Diffinitors
Krakow, Poland 2004**

Foundations

Introduction

Foundations of Dominican Monasteries in Argentina and Chile
By Sr. Ma. Inmaculada Franco, OP

**Monastery of Our Lady of the Rosary
Quillabamba, Peru**
By Sr. Blanca Gómez, OP

**“Maria di Magdala” Monastery
Turin, Italy**
By the Community

**Monastery of the Mother of God
Seoul, Korea**
By Sr. Christina Maria del Si, OP

New Foundation in Langley, British Columbia
By the Sisters from Western Canada

“Behold I make all things new ”: DAX
Sr. Véronique, OP

The Itinerancy of Dominican Cloistered Nuns
By Sr. Mary Rose Figura, OP
Farmington Hills, USA
Meeting of the Eastern and Central European Prioresses
Krakow, Poland 2003

Letter of Fr. Manuel Merten, OP

Dear Sisters,

I am writing these lines from a “spiritually foreign” place, so to speak. An invitation led me to spend a week with Cistercian nuns. Their monastery is situated in the south-east of Austria, near the Hungarian border. I am taking part a bit in the health programme offered by the sisters in their own health resort, riding a bicycle, enjoying the wonderful countryside of Burgenland around the Neusiedler Lake, observing the many animals which are at home in this nature reserve, and tasting the excellent wines, made from grapes which the dear Lord God really spoils with sun and which are mainly produced by small winegrowing firms, carefully planted, cared for and developed: with every glass of wine there comes a corresponding chat with the winegrower who has produced it. Here you can taste the care which has been invested and the offertory prayer receives a deeper meaning: “Blessed are you, Lord, God of all creation. Through your goodness we have this wine to offer, fruit of the vine and work of human hands. It will become our spiritual drink.”

I should like to express my warmest thanks to the many sisters and communities who reacted so positively to my report to the General Chapter which was printed in the last issue of “Monialibus”. Particularly often, thanks were expressed that, in this way, detailed news about new foundations and closures of monasteries could be received. This report has, therefore, fulfilled its purpose, which is also the main reason for “Monialibus”: that the nuns of the Order may learn more from each other and about each other, that they may feel themselves more closely linked, and that their common mission may be more obviously felt and experienced.

I am pleased to be able to inform you, in the following sections, about some new events, developments and particular happenings in connection with my job as promoter.

At the end of February, there was a meeting of the promoters in Cologne, which lasted several days. IDI reported about this. During this, of particular importance was the planning for a meeting of the councils and commissions of the whole Dominican Family on a world scale from the end of April to the beginning of May 2006. From the General Council of the brothers to the World Council of “Dominican Sisters International”, the Councils of the lay organisations, to the International Commission of the Nuns, all should come together at the same time in Prouilhe. The theme of the meeting is: “Catching fire from Dominic’s vision”. Amongst other events, not the least of these will be the commemoration of the eight hundredth anniversary of the year in which this community of nuns in Prouilhe was founded – a sort of birthday party for the brothers and sisters with and for the firstborn child. IDI will report regularly on the progress of the planning for this event.

Between 16th April and 1st May, I was active outside my normal area of activity. The Master of the Order had asked me, together with Father Raymund Klepanec, his assistant for the region of Central and Eastern Europe, to carry out the canonical visitation of the brothers in the Province of Croatia on his authority and in his name. For me it was a time of very complex impressions: priories in scenically, absolutely beautiful settings, some of them with their own beach or at least very close to the Mediterranean, dedicated brothers, diligent students, a busy

and, apostolically speaking, very effective congregation of Dominican sisters – but not a single monastery of nuns of the Order. In this context, there would be no shortage of suitable monastery buildings.

I was also very moved by the still obviously visible traces of the so-called “home war”. This is especially the case for Bosnia and Herzegovina. Everywhere you go, you encounter totally destroyed and abandoned villages. The expelled inhabitants will not come back because of fear, that is, if they are even still alive. This war cost 400,000 lives, and 400,000 Croats alone left their familiar homes and today live either in Croatia proper or in Germany, the USA or Canada. The wounds in the hearts of the people are correspondingly deep – some of our brothers have lost their families, others even mourn the whole population of their home village. It is not easy to preach reconciliation if you feel yourself so strongly to be a victim. How much good it would do for the Croatian Province to have a special place of prayer for this reconciliation, how tempting is the idea to found a monastery of the Order there. Thank God for the fact that prayer does not recognise any territorial boundaries. So I entrust this region and our brothers and sisters who live there to our particular prayer, whatever the country in which you live.

From May 5th to 8th a closed meeting of the General Council took place in Guarmino, a small locality about 80 kilometres south of Rome. Our main theme was the reports of the assistants for the General Chapter, and its more precise preparation.

Soon I shall be attending the meeting of the prioresses from our monasteries in Central and Eastern Europe. It will take place from June 21st to 25th in Radonie in Poland. Our main topic will be communication in our monasteries. After that, we want to plan a meeting for 2005 of all the monasteries of Europe which neither belong to a federation nor are situated in Spain, France or Italy, first amongst ourselves and later in cooperation with the prioresses of the German-speaking monasteries.

From the end of June until the beginning of July I shall be in the monastery of Azzano S. Paolo. Together with Sr. Vincenza Panza, I shall work to prepare the next sitting of the International Commission for the Nuns of the Order. The Commission will meet from 10th to 17th October in Santa Sabina in Rome. Sr. Vincenza represents the Italian monasteries in this commission.

The following are some of the topics on the agenda for the meeting of the International Commission of Nuns:

- The Nuns’ share in the preaching mission of the Order
- Communication and solidarity amongst the nuns of the Order
- Evaluation of opinions about “Monialibus”
- Contemplative life and involvement in justice, peace, and care of creation
- Practical security concerning dealing with matters of canon law (Fr. Joseph Thang, OP – Procurator General of the Order)
- Statistical data about the monasteries and the nuns of the Order – ensuring regular updates – EDP (Fr. Michel O’Rourke, OP)

- Eight hundredth anniversary of “Nuns in the Order of Preachers” – planning a joint celebration? (Suggested by Sr. Marie A. Pascale OP – at the moment in Drogheda in Ireland)
- Procedures for implementing the proposal of three to the Master of the Order for appointing new members of the International Commission of the Nuns of the Order (USA; France; Rest of Europe; Mexico, Spain - Holy Rosary Federation)

Before the beginning of this meeting in Rome, there are, of course, several other tasks on my programme. For example, I shall visit the monasteries in Japan, Taiwan and Korea in July and the beginning of August. In the middle of August, I shall be in Fátima once again, to support the community in preparing for the coming election of a prioress. At the beginning of September, the meeting of German-speaking prioresses takes place. Afterwards I shall fly to Canada and the USA. There I shall take part in the general assembly of the conference of North American monasteries and visit the communities which I have so far not been able to visit.

Once again, I cannot close this letter without an apology. Many of your letters, mails and questions are still awaiting my reply. Whilst travelling it is not always possible even to deal with the most important things, and when I return to Rome the pile is so large that I usually have to leave again before I can deal with it all. Because of this, it is possible even for important questions to get into a permanent circling around without landing – so don't fear to remind me of your requests.

Joined to you by prayer, and with all my brotherly best wishes

fr. Luc de Guise

Information and Day of Thanksgiving Prouilhe - 2 February 2004

Last February 2, 2004, on the occasion of the first anniversary of the arrival of the sisters coming from other countries, Sr. Claire invited the local Dominican family, the Provincials, and the president of the Federation of Nuns to share about the life of the International community and the famous *project* of Prouilhe.

Fr Benoît Montagnes, OP began the meeting with a conference about the Dominican family. As a great and tireless historian, he took pleasure to remind us that the notion of Dominican family – which means those who live the Dominican charism (brethren, sisters, lay people, priests linked with the Order by the Master) – is not a recent idea from the Father Vincent de Couesnongle, but is really traditional. All the Dominican tradition shows that in fact we all belong to the same Order of Preachers (composed of brethren, sisters, lay people) and that we are not just parts which dependant on the Brothers Preachers Order (as if sisters and lay people are subordinated to the brothers...). For many it is hard to accept this idea. It was a mistake when, in 1969, the title of the constitutions was changed to *Book of the Constitutions and Ordinations of the Order of Friars Preachers* from the traditional title *Book of the Constitutions and Ordinations of the Friars of the Order of Preachers*. In 1998 during the Chapter of Bologna, the original name was restored. The unfortunate inversion of the words affected the consciousness of many brothers and even some sisters. The vision of the Order and of the common ministry of preaching, were also affected. We were grateful to Fr. Montagnes, for reminding us of the Dominican tradition in which we share the same apostolic mission of the Order yet each one according to his/her own proper charism.

Then Fr Manuel Merten, the promoter of the nuns, who came from Rome for the occasion, reminded us of how the General Chapter of Providence (USA) had clearly committed itself to the invitation of the community of Prouilhe. As a result, sisters from others monasteries of the world have come to form an international community. The Master supports this community and is paying special attention to the progress of the Project of Prouilhe and its realization.

Just before leaving for the Catholic institute of Toulouse, Fr Jean-Pierre Arfeuil, Provincial of Toulouse, took time to tell us that he will promote greater interaction among the Dominican family, which are present already near Prouilhe-Fanjeaux, in order to facilitate collaboration.

Fr Jean-Claude Lavigne, representing the Provincial of France, gave a delightful homily during the mass. After saying how we could be like the couples Simeon and Anne or Joseph and Mary, he concentrated on the other couple... the two doves in the Gospel reading for the feast of the Presentation.

A festive meal was then shared by the participants: brothers, apostolic sisters, lay people from the Committee of Pilotage. His Eminence, Msgr. Despierres, bishop of Carcassonne, joined them just in time to drink a glass of Blanquette de Limoux (Champagne).

At the beginning of the afternoon, sister Claire showed a “Power-Point” presentation, prepared for the occasion showing photos the International community and their life for the past year, intertwined with images of Dominic and important extract of our Constitutions. After this the guests were invited to the exposition of the nun’s artistic and culinary creations with the opportunity to taste the wonderful specialties from around the world. Thank you Sister Catalina for the delicious Turrón!

Mr. Henri Detours, president of the Committee of Pilotage, then spoke to us about the Piloting Committee, which serves the nuns by reflecting and advising them with regards to their choices and solutions for the project of Prouilhe: the rehabilitation of the Basilica, which includes the liturgical space, the choir of the nuns, and also the guest house. It is hoped that this will have been achieved when we celebrate the 800th anniversary of the foundation of the monastery in 2006-2007.

Brother Philippe Jeannin, coordinator of the project, explained to us the architectural project for the Basilica. This plan was sent to the 60 architects, which were suggested to us after having consulted different instances of the Order. The desire is that rehabilitation creates a sacred space that is simple, sober and beautiful. Those architects were invited to present themselves and express their interest and motivation for the project. At the end of February four architects were selected to present a design by the beginning of June. A panel of judges will then choose the best proposal. If all goes well as planned, the reconstruction work could start in January 2005.

The day ended with a time of question and answers where not only clarifications were made but also helpful recommendations with regards to the project. Msgr. Despierres expressed how impressed he was by the quality of the reflection and the competence of the persons involved. The hope of the nuns is that this rehabilitation will allow Prouilhe to live deeply its vocation at the service of the Order and be a place where every Dominican could feel at home.

**General Chapter of Diffinitors
Krakow, Poland
2004**

(An excerpt from a letter received by Sr. Claire, OP, on the 28th of February 2004)

“The next General Chapter will be held in Krakow, Poland from the 28th of July until the 17th of August 2004. After having consulted the International Commission of Nuns and a discussion with the General Council, the Master of the Order decided to invite two nuns to the Chapter: Sister Claire Marie, OP from Prouilhe, France and Sister Mary Magdalene, OP from Reiste Lage, Germany. Those who are invited have the right to speak and to vote in the Commission of the Chapter and give only the right to speak in the Plenary Sessions.”

The Commission proposes the following:

1. Preaching : preaching in dialogue, preaching as a family, new technologies, new languages, preaching and mission
2. Intellectual life and preaching
3. Common life
4. Vocation and formation
5. Government
6. Economy
7. LCO

Sr. Claire and Sr. Magdalene confide themselves and the Chapter to our prayer.

FOUNDATIONS

Introduction

At the meeting of the International Commission of Nuns in Prouilhe in October of 2003, the members reflected and made a list of suggestions of places in the world where they thought Dominican contemplative life could be encouraged and they articulated some of the reasons for their choices. (cf. Monialibus N* 8)

They did this because the General Chapter of Providence communicated to the Promoter of the Nuns, Fr. Manuel Merten, a petition requesting the aid of the International Commission and the Federations, a map of the world be prepared indicating the places where Dominican monastic life is present; also to arrive at a coordinated evaluation of the places where monasteries could be fortified.

The discussions of the Commission in Prouilhe on this subject were the occasion for a very interesting exchange of information on recent foundations. Following these deliberations, the Commission decided to devote a special issue of Monialibus to share with all the nuns these exciting stories of foundations and how they were made. Here it is!



Foundations of Dominican Monasteries in Argentina and Chile

By Sr. Ma. Inmaculada Franco, OP

The General Chapter of Providence requested the International Commission of Nuns to map out possible foundations of monasteries of nuns in places where there is no Dominican presence yet. This was one of the matters discussed in the last meeting of the Commission held in Prouille (France) from 15 to 25 of October 2003. My contribution to the commission was to share the experience of our Federation in relation to these foundations.

In **1972**, the Monastery of Our Lady of the Rosary of Forcall (Castellon), Spain was near collapse, uninhabitable and beyond repair. Eventually, it broke down. The sisters, after many trials experienced how the Providence was at their side. In Argentina the bishops were asking foundations of monasteries of contemplative life from the Federation. In Mendoza, (Argentina) there was no community of contemplative sisters. The nuns decided not to separate instead to go all together there. Among the pioneer sisters, only five were left, however, the community was continuously blessed with new vocations. At present, the common novitiate of the Federation in Argentina is in Mendoza. The former and present prioresses are among the first Argentinean novices. A community of lay faithful is very close to the community. Their members are considered part of the Dominican family. There is life!

In **1979**, the second foundation was made in Catamarca, also in Argentina by the community of San Justo-Buenos Aires. They did not cease to have vocations. They were petitioned by the bishop at that time who was a Dominican. Around them there is also a very active Dominican Family.

In **1986**, the third foundation was born in Copiapó (Chile). It is now the Common Novitiate for the communities of Chile. The foundresses of this foundation belonged to different communities of the federation in Spain. Among the many fruits of foundation are some vocations for the friars.

In **1990**, the fourth foundation was born in Concepcion (Argentina). The foundresses were one Spanish nun who was 70 years old already, and one nun from each convent in Argentina. These five nuns have started a monastery which the Dominican Fathers and the Bishop of Tacuman had asked for a long time. Vocations have not stop knocking at their door. The Dominican Family is alive and is an ever vigorous reality in that area.

In **1994**, the fifth foundation in Yervas Buenas-Linares (Chile) was started by two nuns from Santiago de Chile, who were 80 and 85 years old and both were sickly, and three nuns from Copiapo which was founded in 1986. Once again, the Lord filled the convent with numerous vocations. They work enthusiastically in the common task of preaching with the Dominican Family around the monastery.

Today, we give thanks to the Lord. We do not feel disappointed. We attest to the intuition of our Father St. Dominic when he said: "The wheat when piled up gets spoiled." We say there is no vocation in Europe, but there are in Africa, Asia, and Latin America...God's grace is truly inexhaustible. Let us place our plans in the hands of God and open our hearts to His will.



**Monastery of Our Lady of the Rosary
Quillabamba, Peru
By Sr. Blanca Gómez, OP**

“A DIOCESE HAS ACQUIRED MATURITY WHEN IT IS ABLE TO FORM ITS OWN PRIESTS AND HAS A MONASTERY OF CLOISTERED NUNS, WHO CARE AND PRAY FOR THE NEEDS OF THE LOCAL CHURCH.”

These eloquent words, written on June 15th 1991, were the beginning of the request that Puerto Maldonado’s Bishop, Juan José Larrañeta, OP, sent to Our Lady of the Rosary’s Federation. The challenge was big, the foundation of a Monastery in the Peruvian jungle, in Quillabamba. But we proceeded with the plans and with M. Teresa Capellán, OP, as Federal Prioress and Fr. Lino Dolan, OP, as Assistant. The Federation Council unanimously approved this new foundation.

On November 24th 1993 we received from Rome the licence for this new foundation. Bishop Juan José Larrañeta ordered a beautiful Monastery having two floors and a wonderful chapel to be built. We could see everywhere his comprehension of contemplative life, his love and good taste.

The sisters who formed the very first community were:

Mother Teresa Capellán Arenas, OP, from Santa Catalina, Lima
Sr. Pilar Diones, OP, from Santa Catalina, Lima
Sr. Marlene Carbajal, OP, from Sta. Catalina, Lima
Sr. Jacinta Mogollon, OP, from Sta. Catalina, Lima
Sr. Cecilia Mandujano, OP, from Sta. Catalina, Lima,
Sr. María Zúñiga, OP, from Sta. Rosa, Arequipa,
Sr. Calcedonia Serrano, OP, from Sta. Catalina Cusco
Sr. Vilma Ramos, OP, from Sta. Catalina, Arequipa,
Sr. Gloria Calcina, OP, from Sta. Catalina, Arequipa

On December 12th 1997, the Monastery of Our Lady of the Rosary was canonically erected. As time goes on, that beloved community is strongly consolidating in spite of the normal difficulties of a new foundation. The native vocations are coming: 1 temporarily Professed, 1 novice, 1 postulant, and many aspirants.

We wish all the best for our young Monastery.

“Maria di Magdala” Monastery
Turin, Italy
By the Community

Our community set out on its adventure on 19 November 1999, when we left our respective monasteries, “Beata Margherita di Savoia” in Alba, Province of Cuneo, and “Matris Domini” in Bergamo, and made our way to Turin. Each of us was responding to a personal, profound, vital need, while we were united in our desire to be a contemplative presence alongside the Dominican friars, sisters and laity at work in this large, complex city.

Our first home was in a building which belonged to the “Pia Unione Colle Bianco di San Michele Arcangelo”, the use of facility was granted to us for two years: this served as the ‘launch pad’ for the experience we are now living.

The Cardinal of Turin had already told us that he saw our new community as a response to a need and a desire. That is how our dream, which was shared and supported by the Master of the Order and by General Promoter for the Nuns, could come true.

We were immediately surprised and delighted by the contacts with many individuals and with groups from the local parish who began by visiting us and asking to share our prayer and times of reflection and silence.

Meanwhile, we were constantly engaged in the search for a definitive place to call our home, but when our period in Colle Bianco expired we accepted the – still provisional – solution offered us by the “Visitazione di Santa Maria” Monastery in Moncalieri (Turin), whose nuns gave us the use of a part of their huge building. It is there that we have continued to develop our community’s project.

This second phase, in a physically more isolated situation, has seen a particular commitment to the deeper study and experience of *lectio divina*, to personal and community study, to sharing and fraternal life. This is especially true of the community meetings which led to the development of our ‘Community project’ – based on research into and confrontation with the essential values of Dominican contemplative life – and to the writing of our Directory, which has already been approved by the Order. We have also continued to welcome individuals and groups for days of retreat, prayer vigils, *lectio divina*, a Bible course on Exodus, and a course of initiation into deep prayer.

At the same time we have had increasingly close relationships with the Dominican Family, especially with the friars, and a fraternal exchange has developed with the nearby Chieri priory, home of the Italian novitiate.

We can say that Providence has constantly extended a helping hand to us, above all in the gift of a house thanks to the generosity of a lady who made our acquaintance. We expect to make our definitive move in autumn. The house is surrounded by the unspoilt green of the hill above Moncalieri, and was restored ten years ago as a centre of spirituality and a site for cultural meetings. Our benefactress cultivated this ideal in her heart and regards our presence as the

fulfilment of her dream. The area is almost perfect for a monastery: a place of silence, study and prayer, open to welcome anyone who is in search of a space for the Spirit.

Our gratitude is immense and heartfelt, and we feel that we are being encouraged to continue our journey, open to the surprises that may be sprung on us by the Lord who, we are certain, will continue to accompany us with his gentleness and his strength.



Monastery of the Mother of God Seoul, Korea

By Sr. Christina Maria del Si, OP

Our Mother of God Monastery in Korea was erected on February 2, 1993, but it all began several years before when a German Dominican priest, Fr. Reginald, OP, who was working here in Korea, met some young girls desiring the Dominican contemplative life. At that time the Order was not established in this country so the priest sent the three girls to our Monastery in Taiwan. Little by little we realized it would be better for the Korean aspirants to go directly to our Monastery in Olmedo, Valladolid (Spain).

With the passage of time, Korean vocations increased and we saw in this a call of God to establish a Monastery here in Korea.

In 1990, a Spanish Sister who was appointed vicar of this infant foundation arrived with a solemnly professed Korean Sister. A few months later four more sisters came; two of them Koreans.

The late Bishop of the Diocese of Wonju received the sisters with an open heart. But he could not give us economic support due to the poverty of his diocese. Nevertheless, he gave us the property - a lovely piece of land in a mountain where the Sanctuary of Beron is located in the valley below.

To start this foundation required a deep act of faith in God's Providence. We had, in fact the plans for the future monastery, we had the land, we had the sisters, but we had no money for the construction and we had no means of obtaining the large amount of money required.

We were told that it was a custom in Korea to ask help from the well-to-do parishes of Seoul. A priest could make known our cause in a homily and the faithful would help us. God sent us the priest we needed and the faithful helped us far beyond our expectations. We only had to ask for help from ten parishes and we received the necessary amount to build our Monastery.

The construction was finished by November 1992. In December our sisters left the little prefabricated house in which they lived for two years and moved into new monastery. After having lived two years in a very small house, the monastery seemed so big and empty!

On December 6, 1992, Fr. Timothy Radcliffe, OP, visited our community. It was a fraternal and joyful event. On January 13, 1993, the final group of four Sisters with Mother Esperanza from our monastery in Olmedo, Spain arrived. The community was complete at last! We started to prepare for the ceremony of the enclosure that was to be held on February 2, 1993 the Feast of the Presentation of Jesus in the Temple. It was a lovely ceremony indeed. More than a thousand faithful came to share in the Mass and blessing of our monastery. Even though it was a cold day the sun shone brilliantly and did its best to warm us.

Of course, the adventure of starting a new monastery was not easy. At times our hearts sang and at times they sank! But in the midst of all we always saw and felt God's providential care, and we thank God He blessed us with a great amount of good humor.

At the beginning we did not know what kind of manual work we would do. We tried different things and failed. But after a year or so we started to make hosts. Now it is our principal work. We also bake and sell cookies and work in our garden.

God has sent us good vocations and the task of formation is a great challenge, but those in charge are Our Lord and Our Lady. We are but little instrument in those hands.

“How good, how delightful it is for all to live together like.....Dominican Cloister Sisters!



New Foundation in Langley, British Columbia

By the Sisters from Western Canada

The foundation of Dominican Nuns in British Columbia is one part of the great adventure of establishing the Dominican Family here in Western Canada. This was the dream of

Timothy Radcliffe as Master, a dream to strengthen the Dominican presence throughout the world. The Friars, Dominican Laity and the Nuns are now all established, growing and stretching together, seeking to incarnate Dominic's vision and the charism of the Order in this wonderful place.

Sponsored by the Monastery of the Blessed Sacrament of Farmington Hills, Michigan, and with volunteers from five of the American monasteries, we began in November of 1999 in Surrey, BC, living rent-free in a small house made available to us by the Archdiocese on the grounds of their retreat centre. New arrivals brought the number of volunteers to eight, and with the help of the Order and of benefactors, new and old, we were able to relocate in February of 2002 after purchasing a house on fifteen acres of agricultural land in Langley, BC. We raise sheep and Christmas trees for income and to comply with Canadian laws regarding the use of land in the agricultural reserve.

Our Dominican presence has been very well accepted by the people of the archdiocese both in Surrey and Langley. Several articles have appeared in the *BC Catholic* and this has helped us to become better known. Those who visit us experience the wonderful Dominican spirit of joy. The Dominican Family gathers at the monastery once a year for prayer, fellowship and shared study. All this has been an affirmation and deep blessing for our new foundation.

We are now at a point where we have to consider building a larger monastery in order to be able to accept candidates. It will be through young women coming to join us that our foundation will really take permanent root and become fully Canadian. In order to expand we may again need to relocate. The work is the Lord's and we continue to trust in his provident guidance as the foundation grows into a fully established Monastery here in the Fraser Valley area of British Columbia. We ask your prayers that He, who has begun this good work in us, may help us bring it to completion.

"Behold I make all things new ": DAX
Sr. Véronique, OP

The day when Sister Mary Emmanuelle (of Bocaue, Philippines) asked me to write about the foundation of Dax for "Monialibus" we were celebrating St. Matthias. At the office, the reading we heard (Eph. 2) resounded so well our own history that I put it as our thanksgiving. Yes, the Word truly became flesh.

You who in the past were dead...

Clairefontaine-en-Yvelines in the region of Paris (50 km Southwest of Paris) is well known in France because the French National Soccer Team has its training camp there. In the center of the town there was also the Monastery of the Dominican Nuns.

700 km to the South... a small bathing resort: Dax in Southwestern France, Department of Landes, near to the Spanish border and the Atlantic Ocean.

Sometime ago the two monasteries belonged to two different federations; today the two are united in one Federation 'Notre-Dame des Prêcheurs'.

Remember that in this time, then....

1993... In Dax as in Clairefontaine-en-Yvelines the awakening of the community was rude. At both places the immediate future raised many questions: The prioresses arrived at the end of their term and it was difficult to find a replacement; the buildings were too big for these communities advancing in age and their future was not assured. In short everyday-life became difficult.

Becoming a dwelling of God

October 1994... at the unanimous request of the Community the Master of the Order appointed a prioress in Clairefontaine-en-Yvelines.

What to do? Ideas emerged here and there, (modernizing, moving, build something smaller, ask for help ?...) The idea emerged in February 1995 at the meeting of the prioresses : Why not unite Dax and Clairefontaine to build something together !

This was the decision of the two communities to unite and build something " together ", to form a new community, and not a pre-established project that brings them together... The first contacts were decisive.

You have been brought very close

19th of March 1995... Two Sisters from Clairefontaine went to Dax to " see the place". No hesitation at all. If union this has to be in Dax where the climate, the buildings and the environment seem to be more suitable to welcome " older " sisters.

It is Him who made one of the two

At the end of March 1995... The Community of Dax decides by a vote to put its monastery at the disposition for this union, and in April Clairefontaine accepts by a vote to move to Dax. These two votes indicate the profile of the operation: sell the monastery of Clairefontaine and use the money to renovate Dax.

He has destroyed the wall of separation...for one building

June 1995... Two architects, a married couple accept to plan the renovation of the monastery of Dax and to bring it to comply with the present norms. They direct the works day by day. Taking advantage of the summer they visit several Dominican monasteries; at the same time we establish a list of all the necessities (without provision for a novitiate...).

He is our peace....

August 1995... In order to help the construction and allow rapid progress of the works, all sisters of Dax leave their monastery and are welcomed in other monasteries nearby. Only afterwards did we fully appreciate the importance of this generous gesture! Temporary moving but the experience is the same: One has to leave 'my' monastery.

The buildings of Dax are completely emptied and at the end of her term the Prioress of Dax goes back to her monastery in Saint-Denis (Island of La Réunion).

The works start on the 4th of September. It will take more than 9 months.

Through the cross....

At the same time in Clairefontaine the moving and the closure had to be organized. A difficult period asking for great detachment. One leaves much more behind than one can take along! Period of separation too... some sisters chose other communities.

Everything is gathered and boxes are piled up in different rooms according to their destination. Several associations are beneficiaries...

Restoring the peace....

Moments to say goodbye but also to prepare for the life in the diocese of Dax, for example, when the Bishop himself came to Clairefontaine to get to know the sisters; or in discovering some aspects of the Monastery by means of pictures giving an idea of the extent of the works!

March 1996... The last two sisters leave Clairefontaine and all the sisters dispersed wait for the signal to come to Dax. Obviously the works take longer than planned.

Both of us in the one and only Spirit

Not very far from there the small monastery of St. Martin de Hinx makes its contribution in preparing the liturgy. Since we didn't have the time to put together our repertoires of songs we needed something for the beginning. Not only did they prepare a "white" booklet for the Easter season, but one of the sisters from St. Martin came herself to Dax in order to set up the liturgy!

You are no longer aliens or foreign visitors

After a short delay due to finishing work and the celebration of Easter, the 20th of April 1996 all the sisters are summoned. In a few hours some twenty sisters arrive, get to know the renewed and renovated place and take possession. Emotions and joy are visible on their faces. Discoveries for all because even the sisters of Dax see the novelties for the first time! Light, colors, flowers, everything contributes to the joy of meeting again or getting to know new faces...

You are part of God's household. You form a building and are part of the apostles and prophets for its foundations....

Who welcomes whom? From the very beginning it is the Lord who precedes us and only He welcomes. We all have the same desire in our heart: To become 'sisters' and live fully our life as Dominican nuns (certainly not being an 'old people home'...). Our future with its canonical situation is in His hands.

And Christ Jesus himself for its main cornerstone

Names are put on the doors of the cells, a timetable is proposed, a page prepared to sing the first Vespers... Also at 17.30 pm the same day after having visited the monastery the sisters are invited to go to the choir. Several student brothers from the Bordeaux priory have come to encourage us. They will be the cantors and there goes the invitatory: « *Dieu, viens à mon aide...* ». All respond with one voice and one heart: « *Seigneur, viens vite à mon secours !* »

It was like a miracle... and ever since the enthusiasm has never dropped...

He wanted to create a NEW human being

We receive a 'new' name for this 'new' monastery. A prioress is appointed by the Master of the Order.

All the goods are put in common, we continue the work of Dax: Altarbread baking and bookbinding and also two months later the guesthouse is reopened.

Some hired people help in the infirmary, the maintenance of the monastery and in the garden...

Shortly after the community of St. Martin de Hinx becomes a vicariate of the Monastery of Dax. For some years the sisters remaining in St. Martin come to Dax once a month for the "community days" and for the major liturgical seasons. There are numerous exchanges.

In Him you have become one

May 1997... The Monastery of Pellevoisin faces vital questions. They contact Dax. In 1998 the community unites with the monastery of Dax (8 sisters).

Peace to you who are far away!

In 1999 a young Hungarian makes an experience. Today she is a temporary professed. Others follow.

Peace to you who are nearby!

In 1999 closing of the Monastery of St. Martin de Hinx. The 3 sisters come to Dax.

In 2001 closing of the Monastery of St. Palais/sur mer 4 sisters chose to come to Dax.

In Him all building will be adjusted.....

During these years: several in temporary transfer, seven transfiliations, one solemn profession, one temporary profession, some aspirants... (some coming from non-Dominican communities, even other countries).

All these exchanges have been enriching for the sisters as well as the community! They contribute to its animation and it's taking roots. Beneficial mutual aid...

In Him all building will be raised up.....

As time goes by our 'own rites' get into place but it is our Dominican Institutions that always bring us together and that allow us to dwell together in unanimity. These shared values are the real foundation beyond the faces of each monastery. As for the liturgy it remains the privileged place of community building.

In order to become a holy temple

In 2003-2004 we decided to establish our Directory. With the rich experience of seven years we can write down the decisions taken day by day and what has become our common reference.

Thanks to Him we all have access to the Father

Today we are more than 40 sisters. Already 9 sisters have gone before us to God! Because of serious health problems two sisters have been welcomed in 'long sojourn' specialized institutions.

As a conclusion, some strong points:

- The communities have not waited until the last hour to reflect on their future (canonical visitations, reflection with the Assistant of the Federation and other brothers or sisters).
- The first two communities united before their project was in the blueprint; it is not the project that preceded the new community.
- The dispersion of the sisters put the two communities on an equal level regarding the newness of place and project.
- And the gathering of the sisters the same day in a new place brought to birth ‘ipso facto’ a ‘new’ community.
- The appointment by the Master of the Order of a new prioress from elsewhere and the discretion of the community of Dax allowed for a true novelty. Never did we hear: "*We did it always this way !*"
- After two years experience and a canonical visitation it was decided that we are a monastery in the full sense according the Institutions of the Order, election of the prioress, opening of a novitiate etc...
- This project has been lived in FAITH (the sisters did not meet before their arrival and did not visit the place before they settled down!). Going forward in faith without any guaranty allowed to be open for all the following events thereafter.

As Brother Timothy told us rightly so: "*the important thing is not to survive but to live !*"

It is this Life that we tried to share with you... Alleluia.

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The Itinerancy of Dominican Cloistered Nuns

By Sr. Mary Rose Figura, OP

Farmington Hills, USA

Meeting of the Eastern and Central European Prioresses

Krakow, Poland 2003

Before I begin, I would like to thank Fr. Manuel Merten and Sr. M. Stanislawka for inviting me to Krakow to meet you, my Dominican brothers and sisters of Eastern and Central Europe. I consider it a privilege to have this opportunity to share with you some of my community's experiences in "giving birth" to a foundation first in Western Canada and then, shortly afterwards to one in Vietnam.

I have used the words "giving birth" to describe our activity in making these foundations. Yes, in a very real sense, this work is a type of "creation", a giving birth to new life, a bringing into existence Dominican contemplative life in an area where it had been previously lacking. Likewise, there is a strong analogy of a community organizing a foundation to a woman in labor; to her who suffers much until the child is born and then forgets the pain as she beholds her newborn child with delight and much joy. So, there is both pain and joy in the process of establishing a new foundation, but the joy far outweighs the suffering.

Our Community in Farmington did not begin the process of making either of the two foundations that we are now sponsoring. We did not sit down at Chapter one day and say, "Wouldn't it be a good idea to make a foundation?" No, it wasn't that way. Rather, the Master of the Order heard from both the Canadian and the Vietnamese Dominicans that they needed and very much wanted a monastery of Dominican Nuns, so that the Order of Preachers, the Family of St. Dominic would be present in its fullness.

The Dominicans in Canada, whose presence had been previously concentrated in the Eastern half of their country, began seeing, within the last several years, great potential for expanded ministry in Western Canada. The reason for this is that the Church in the Archdiocese of Vancouver, which is on the West Coast, is itself, growing rapidly. Many new churches and schools are being built now to accommodate the increasing Catholic population. The Canadian Dominicans knew that they would have to look outside of their country for a sponsoring monastery because the sisters settling in Vancouver would have to speak the official language of that area which is English. The only other Monastery of nuns in Canada is located in a region whose culture is primarily of French origin, and naturally, these nuns speak French.

Since none of the American monasteries were in a position to single-handedly begin a new foundation, Fr. Timothy Radcliffe responded to the Canadians' desires by writing a letter to all the US monasteries asking individual nuns to write directly to him if they felt called to volunteer for a Canadian foundation. After he received a number of responses, the Master invited our community to be the "sponsoring" monastery.

This is when our painful struggle began. We are an aging community, just like all of the other monasteries in the US. Our youngest sister volunteered for this mission, along with two other sisters who were part of our core work force. The question was, "How will we be able to

manage without them?" I must confess, we were reluctant, at first, to respond to the Master's plea. The other United States monasteries were reluctant as well; they also thought that it might be too difficult to release their individual sisters who had volunteered. After much prayer and many chapter discussions, we finally, still with some reluctance, gave in and agreed to do this out of love for the Order and in obedience to the Master. We were taking a risk in faith that God in His providence would care for us here at home, and that our sacrifice would bring new life to the Order in Canada.

And so, in November of 1999, the Foundresses arrived in Vancouver from the five different American monasteries. All of the sisters became assigned to our Farmington monastery, with the prioress and council of Farmington as their superiors. It was a great blessing that these sisters were a spirited group ardently desiring to establish Dominican contemplative life in Canada. That dedication helped them to overcome the challenges of how to form one "Vancouver" community from the varying traditions of 5 different American houses!

There was a growth in maturity, responsibility and fidelity to the Dominican contemplative life within the founding sisters, themselves. They had left behind all that was familiar and dear to them. Like Abraham, they left their country and embraced the unknown, trusting in the Providence of God.

The laity in Canada saw how enthusiastic the nuns were about their vocation, and asked, "What is this Dominican spirit?" It wasn't long before the local people caught the sisters' energy and spirit and formed a new Chapter of Dominican Laity in the Archdiocese of Vancouver.

The nuns at home in Farmington felt a new vitality and interest in the progress of the foundation. How exciting to follow the good news of how the Dominican life was developing and to know that we were an important part of that. There was more enthusiasm at recreation periods with stimulating conversations that did not focus merely on self-centered interests but on the latest news and activities of the foundations.

Later, when we took on the Vietnam foundation, our sisters were greatly enriched by the introduction to a beautiful but also a very different culture. As an example: The Vietnamese consider it impolite to give "no" for an answer. Therefore, one really does not know if they agree or disagree. It took our novice mistress some time to discover this and to deal with it. As a community we became more appreciative of, as well as accepting the differences in others. This offered us an important growth experience that we otherwise would not have had.

As an aging community, it would have been very easy to focus only on ourselves and our needs. These projects were a blessing for us because they turned our thoughts "outward". After hearing about the great hardships that our dear sisters in Vietnam have to contend with under the Communist government, how could we dwell on our own little discomforts and pains?

This active participation in the establishment of Dominican Nuns in Vietnam gave us a sense of mission. It changed our lives. We became more and more aware of the Dominican Family and its activities and that we are a vital part of this living world-wide organism. It made

us grow in the realization of our identity as Dominicans and that we had real part in the expansion of the Order.

In our Master Carlos Aspiroz's recent letter he said that he discovered what was threatening the roots of our vocation was "a certain immobility". He added that "This inertia provokes a sort of paralysis, a settling down which ends up mortally wounding the most generous energies of our being and living as daughters and sons of St. Dominic."

In our reluctance to spend ourselves founding these monasteries, we almost succumbed to this "immobility - paralysis - settling down". Fortunately for us, by submitting to the wishes of the Master, our community was able to "interpret the present time and be attentive to the will of God" (quoting from the same letter). We have now a sense of mission in solidarity with our brothers and sisters in the Dominican family without compromising our fidelity to our charism as Cloistered Dominican Nuns.

Fr. Timothy Radcliffe went to Vietnam in 1998 to make a canonical visitation. As he spoke with the Brothers and Sisters, he realized that there was a strong interest in having a Dominican monastery established there. A number of Sisters told him that they were drawn to the contemplative life, but they also wanted to be Dominican. Because there was no monastery in Vietnam, these sisters entered active Dominican Congregations. After listening to their individual stories, the Master encouraged and challenged them to take some steps towards establishing a monastery of Dominican nuns in Vietnam.

Shortly afterwards, at their Provincial Chapter in 1999, in answer to the earnest desire of the Master of the Order and many of the brothers and sisters, a committee was formed to facilitate the establishment of a Dominican monastery. It was pointed out that although the Dominican Order had been present in Vietnam for 450 years, there never had been a monastery of Dominican Cloistered Nuns in that country. Imagine, a Dominican friar, Fr. Gaspar de Santa Cruz arrived in Vietnam from Spain in the year 1550 but there had been no Dominican cloistered nuns in all of those years! It was time to do something about that!

The active Dominican Sisters began as a group of fervent women who devoted themselves to works for the Church. They cared for orphans, taught catechism and visited the sick. They began to live in community and prayed together. The Conference of Bishops began instructing these women and prepared them to receive the vows of religion, and in 1951, thereby establishing the Congregation of Dominican Sisters of St. Catherine of Siena. Today there are 5 autonomous congregations which have formed into a federation. These 5 groups combined, have close to 1000 sisters and have many vocations!

Sister Maria Rose Huong, who was formerly the Prioress General of one of the Vietnamese Dominican communities was very drawn to the contemplative life and was earnest about establishing a monastery. The Vietnamese government does not allow foreigners to enter the country to reside there for any length of time. So, she knew that nuns from other countries would be prevented from making a foundation in Vietnam. Therefore Sr. Maria Rose asked the advice of both Fr. Timothy Radcliffe and Fr. Viktor Hofstetter, the former promoter for the nuns. Fr. Viktor had suggested that she contact either the nuns in Japan or the ones in the Philippines

because culturally they were close. Sister visited them and the nuns there were very willing to be of help by offering the Vietnamese sisters an opportunity for formation as cloistered nuns.

Sr. Maria Rose also came to the United States and visited some of the monasteries. As a young sister, she had received much of her religious training here in the US. One of her acquaintances told her about our Monastery and she came for a visit. Our novice mistress explained our process of formation to Sr. Maria Rose, who was very impressed with it. She asked to be allowed to come to receive a two year canonical novitiate in preparation for a foundation in Vietnam. Sister returned to Farmington in August of 1999 with the approval of Fr. Timothy Radcliffe. In May of 2000, she was joined by Sr. Theresa Tam as the first “seeds” of the future community of nuns in Vietnam.

It was our intention as a community, simply to offer hospitality and novitiate formation to our Vietnamese sisters. But then, the Master of the Order wrote asking us to take on the responsibility of the new Vietnamese monastery by formally becoming the founding monastery. As you know, according to our Constitutions, only an existing monastery can found another Dominican monastery. This was somewhat of a shock to us because we were already involved in caring for the foundation in Western Canada. Our greatest concern was the financial one. As a community we struggled over the fact that our Constitutions (LCM 230, II) say that the founding monastery should have enough material resources to be able to help the foundation for several years without notable detriment to itself. We were already supporting the Canada foundation. Our own funds were getting low because of the recession. So we wrote to the Master about our dilemma. He urged us not to worry, that the Vietnamese Dominicans and the Curia itself would not let us down. So, once again, our community reached out in faith and obedience and agreed to be the founding monastery.

The novice mistress and I, together with Fr. Merten, went to Vietnam last year in October, 2002. We had a meeting with the Archbishop of Ho Chi Minh City who approved the project. We had several meetings with the major superiors of the Dominican congregations as well as the Provincial of the Vietnam Province, who agreed to be an advisory body for this new project. The Provincial, the Federation President, Sr. Theresa Tam and Sr. Maria Rose Huong became the admissions board that would review any application for the foundation. It was set up this way so that the two Sisters would have adequate supervision and assistance on the local level. The Prioress and Council of Farmington retained the administrative role.

The arrangement that we made was that the only candidates to be considered will be those who are already perpetually professed religious in one of the 5 Congregations in Vietnam. The candidate has to seek the approval of her own major superior. After she has the written permission of the Major superior, the sister submits her petition to the admissions board. If she is approved, the sister spends 6 months as an aspirant with Sr. Maria Rose and Theresa in Vietnam. During this time, the sister studies English to prepare her for the formation in the USA. If the aspirancy is successful and she is again approved by the admissions board, the sister applies to the prioress, council and chapter in Farmington Hills for permission to come for the canonical novitiate of two years. Just recently three sisters were approved by the admissions board, and by the prioress, council and chapter at Farmington. They will arrive as soon as they get the government approval to travel.

God is blessing this fledgling monastery. They already have a house fully paid for through the generosity of number Vietnamese benefactors residing in the US. They have the good fortune of having daily Mass in their home, celebrated by the Dominican Friars who live near by. Their monastery is under the patronage of “Our Lady of the Holy Spirit”.

Let me now summarize our experience.

What were our “labor pains”?

1. Fear of failure

Fear that the founding community will suffer from the diminishment of vital members in the work force. How will we manage? Fear that financially we would not be able to meet the demands of all that is needed to establish a monastery and to provide for the needs of the foundresses.

2. Pain of separation

We would no longer see our sisters and hear their opinions at chapter discussions and have their help in community projects. The nuns going on the foundation leaves the security of familiar surroundings, familiar routine, familiar faces. They grieve, suffer a sense of loss over leaving their community, friends and position they held in the community. They must adapt to new surroundings and the lack of many of the conveniences of one’s own monastery.

3. The pain of forming community

The foundresses had to learn to live together in mutual charity, able to dialogue with one another and make decisions for the common good, yielding to one another in a spirit of detachment, letting go of their own way of doing things, with a painful growth in maturity.

4. The burden of supervising the foundation

This entailed trips to visit the foundations, providing for their needs, extra contact with the Archdiocese and the Order and the anxiety of watching over the growth and development of the foundation. Making wise choices of sisters to send on the foundation. They should be well grounded and have a strong desire to be faithful to the charism of Dominican cloistered life. Discernment is needed to see if the nun is dissatisfied with her home community, seeking adventure or prestige. Courage is needed to ask a sister to return to her home community if her presence is disruptive to the others. The needs to choose a vicaress that will work to form community, getting them work together for the common goal. She should be able to work well with the prioress of the founding community and yet be able to use good judgment in day to day matters.

What are the joys of new births?

- There is a new sense of identity and mission as Dominican Nuns.
- A new sense of belonging to the world wide Dominican Family.
- The delight in seeing a Dominican monastery takes root in a new area, grow and flourish.

- A greater enthusiasm and zeal to be faithful to the living of our charism as Dominican cloistered nuns - both on the part of the foundresses and on the founding community. A desire for greater authenticity because “you cannot give what you do not have”. A greater faith in the providence of God, with meager resources, much can be accomplished.
- Livelier recreations, not focusing on ourselves, but outward toward the needs and activities of the Order and the Church.
- A better spirit of community by working together to assure the success of the foundation.
- The broadening of our view of the world and being enriched by the contact with another culture.

Having overcome our fears and launched out in a spirit of obedience, in faith, hope and love, we discovered that not only did we give birth to new life in Canada and Vietnam, but we, ourselves experienced a new springtime and a rebirth in Farmington by the enthusiasm these ventures engendered.