

THE RULE OF THE DOMINICAN LAITY (BACKGROUND)

The Dominican Laity originated in its present form with the promulgation of the first Rule under Munio de Zamora, Master of the Order, in 1285. The spiritual origin of the Laity was in the penitential movements centred around St Dominic, who gathered around himself groups of the laity for the spiritual and material defence of the Church and for apostolic work. The Laity has existed, under various names, as long as the Dominican Order itself and has always performed specific functions and collaborated closely with the other branches of the Dominican Family.

There have been five Rules of the Dominican Laity since the foundation of the Order. The First was that promulgated by Munio de Zamora in 1285, for the "Brothers and Sisters of Penance of St Dominic". The Rule of Munio, slightly amended, received Papal approval in 1405. This Rule survived for centuries, serving the laity and being adopted for other branches of the Dominican Family.

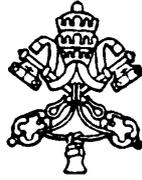
The Second Rule, adapted to the new Code of Canon Law in 1917, was approved in 1923 under Master Louis Theissing, with the title: "Rule of the Secular Third Order of St. Dominic".

After Vatican II, the need was felt for a new Rule or an updating of the 1923 Rule; accordingly, the Third Rule was approved in 1964. However, the General Chapter of River Forest in 1968 proposed a Fourth Rule, which was promulgated by Master Aniceto Fernandez in 1969 and approved on an experimental basis by the Sacred Congregation for Religious in 1972 under the title: "Rule of the Lay Fraternities of St Dominic". With this title, reference to "Third Order" had disappeared, to be confirmed by legislation of the 1974 General Chapter abolishing such terms as First, Second or Third Order.

Finally, after the promulgation of the new Code of Canon Law in 1983 and the "Bologna Document" on the Dominican Family in 1983, the General Chapter of Rome in 1983 commissioned the Master of the Order to hold an International Congress of the Dominican Laity in order to renew and adapt its Rule. The Congress was held in Montreal, Canada, in 1985 and a new Rule was prepared. This, the Fifth Rule, the "Statutes of Fraternities of Lay Dominicans", was approved by the Sacred Congregation for Religious and Secular Institutes in January 1987 and promulgated by Master Damian Byrne on 28 January 1987.

The Dominican Laity is governed by these "Statutes of Fraternities of Lay Dominicans", by the General Declarations of the Master of the Order and General Chapters and by Provincial or national Directories, covering questions of local organisation and practice, as provided for in the Rule and the General Declarations. These Directories are prepared by the Laity in the local area and are submitted for approval to the pertinent authority (LCO 149).

CONGREGATION FOR RELIGIOUS AND SECULAR INSTITUTES



Prot. #D. 27-1-87

The Master General of the Order of Preachers on March 14, 1986, through the Procurator General, sent this Congregation the text of the Rule of the Lay Fraternities of Saint Dominic in order to obtain a definitive approval of the text.

After mature consideration and paying attention to the favourable vote of the Congress, this Congregation by force of the present decrees approves the text, of which there is an exemplary in the Archives of the Congregation, together with the corrections of the Congress presented in the letter sent with it.

Anything to the contrary notwithstanding.

Given at Rome on January 15, 1987.

Jerome Cardinal Hamer, OP,
Prefect

Archbishop Vincent Fagiolo,
Secretary

CURIA GENERALIS ORDINIS PRAEDICATORUM



TO THE LAY FRATERNITIES OF SAINT DOMINIC

Dear Brothers and Sisters in the Lord and Saint Dominic:

Joyfully I give you the text of the Rule of the Lay Fraternities of Saint Dominic, which has very recently (January 15, 1987) been definitively approved by the Congregation for Religious and Secular Institutes.

The text of the preceding Rule, promulgated by Father Aniceto Fernandez in 1969, was approved by the Holy See on an experimental basis. The General Chapter held in Rome in 1983 commissioned the Master General of the order to hold an international meeting of the Dominican Laity in order to renew and adapt the Rule of the Dominican Laity. This meeting, held in Montreal, Canada, June 24-29, 1985, produced the text which is now definitively approved.

Let this Rule be in your hearts and in your fraternities as a gospel ferment to nourish holiness and promote the apostolate together with the whole Dominican Family.

Greetings in the Lord.

Given at Rome, January 28, 1987, on the Feast of Saint Thomas Aquinas.

Damian Byrne, OP
Master of the Order

THE RULE OF THE LAY FRATERNITIES OF SAINT DOMINIC

Translated by Fr Columba Ryan OP

I. THE FUNDAMENTAL CONSTITUTION OF THE DOMINICAN LAITY

1. Laity In The Church

Among the disciples of Christ, those men and women who live in the world are, by their baptism and confirmation, made sharers in the prophetic, priestly and royal offices of our Lord Jesus Christ. They have as their vocation to radiate the presence of Christ in the midst of the peoples so that the divine message of salvation be known and accepted everywhere by the whole of mankind. (Decree of Vatican Council II, *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, on the apostolate of the laity, paragraph 3).

2. Dominican Laity

Some among them are moved by the Holy Spirit to live according to the spirit and charism of Saint Dominic, and are incorporated into the Order by special commitment according to statutes of their own.

3. Dominican Family

They form communities and, together with other groups in the Order, make up one family (cf. *Constitutions of the Brethren*, 1. IX)

4. Special Character of the Dominican Laity

Hence they are marked out by the particular style of their spiritual life and of their service to God and to their neighbour in the Church. As members of the Order, they share its apostolic mission, by study, prayer and preaching in keeping with their state as members of the laity.

5. Apostolic Mission

Following the example of Saint Dominic, Saint Catherine of Siena and others of our forebears who were shining examples of the life of the Order and the Church, they draw strength from fraternal communion, above all to bear witness to the faith which is theirs, to be sensitive to the needs of people in the present, and to serve truth.

6. They pay careful attention to the principal objectives of the church's present-day apostolate, and feel a special compulsion to show real compassion for every form of distress, to defend freedom and to promote justice and peace.

7. Inspired by the Order's charism, they remember always that apostolic work springs from the fullness of contemplation.

II. LIFE OF THE FRATERNITIES

8. Life of the Fraternities

They do their best to live in true community in the spirit of the beatitudes, and they give expression to this in regard to other members of the fraternity, particularly the poor and the sick, and as circumstances require, by doing works of mercy and sharing with them what resources they may have, and by offering prayers for the dead, so that all may be united in heart and soul in God (Acts 4:32).

9. Together with the brothers and sisters of the Order the members of the fraternities take part in the apostolate; they are to share actively in the life of the Church, and be ever ready to work with other apostolic groups.

10. The principal sources from which the Lay Dominicans draw strength to go forward in a vocation which combines the contemplative and the apostolic in the closest union, are the following:

- a) hearing the divine word, and reading sacred scripture, especially the New Testament;
- b) as far as possible daily liturgical celebration and participation in the sacrifice of the Mass;
- c) regular celebration of the sacrament of reconciliation;

- d) celebration of the liturgical hours in union with the whole Dominican family, as well as private prayer such as meditation and the rosary;
- e) conversion of heart through the spirit and practice of the repentance demanded by the gospel;
- f) sustained study of revealed truth, and constant reflection on the problems-of the day in the light of faith;
- g) devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary according to the Order's tradition, and to our holy father Saint Dominic, and to Saint Catherine of Siena;
- h) spiritual retreats from time to time.

11. Formation

The purpose of Dominican formation is to produce people truly adult in faith and so able to hear, celebrate and proclaim the Word of God. It belongs to each province to draw up a programme:

- a) for the gradual formation of beginners;
- b) for the on-going formation of everyone, including those who are isolated.

12. Every Dominican should be able to preach the Word of God. It is in this preaching that the prophetic office of the baptised Christian is exercised. In the present world the preaching of the Word of God implies especially the defence of human dignity. Promotion of Christian unity and dialogue with non-Christians and nonbelievers are part of the Dominican vocation.

13. The principle sources for a complete Dominican formation are these:

- a) the Word of God and theological reflection;
- b) liturgical prayer;
- c) history and tradition of the Order;
- d) contemporary documents of the Church and of the Order;
- e) understanding the signs of the times.

14. Profession or Commitment

To be incorporated into the Order, members must make a profession or commitment by which they formally commit themselves to live according to the spirit of Saint Dominic and in the manner prescribed by the rule. Profession or commitment is either temporary or final. In making profession the following form, or one substantially the same, is to be used: "In honour of almighty God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and of the Blessed Virgin Mary, and of Saint Dominic, I, N/N, in the presence of you, N/N, President of this Fraternity, and of you, N/N, Religious Promoter, representing the Master of the Order of Preachers, promise to live according to the rule of the Laity of Saint Dominic (for three years)/(for my whole life)."

III. ORGANISATION AND GOVERNMENT OF THE FRATERNITIES

15. The Fraternity is the best nurturing ground and growth-point for each member's dedication to his/her vocation. Frequency of meetings will vary from one Fraternity to another. Regularity of attendance is the measure of each member's fidelity.

16. The admission of new members will follow the prescriptions of the directory in regard to the qualifications of candidates and the time factor. It is the responsibility of the lay-person in charge of the Fraternity first to take a decisive vote of the Fraternity Council, then, with the Religious Promoter, to proceed to the reception of the candidate in whatever rite is laid down by the Directory.

17. After the period of probation laid down by the directory, and with the vote of the Fraternity Council, the lay person in charge, together with the Religious Promoter, will receive the candidate's temporary or final profession.

18. Jurisdiction of the Order and Autonomy of the Fraternities

Lay fraternities are subject to the jurisdiction of the Order; but they enjoy the autonomy proper to the laity by which they are self ruling.

19. At Order Level

a) The Master of the Order, as successor to Saint Dominic and head of the whole Dominican family, presides over all fraternities in the world. It is his task to maintain intact in them the spirit of the Order, to establish practical rules according to the demands of time and place, and to promote the spiritual good and the apostolic zeal of members.

b) The Promoter General represents the Master of the Order for all fraternities, and submits their proposals to the Master of the Order at the General Chapter.

20. At Provincial Level

a) The Prior Provincial presides over the fraternities within the territorial limits of his province, and, with the consent of the local bishop, establishes new fraternities. b) The Provincial Promoter (brother or sister) represents the Prior Provincial, and is a member of the Provincial Lay Council with full rights. He/she is appointed by the Provincial Chapter, or by the Prior Provincial with his Council, after the Provincial Lay Council of the Dominican Laity has been consulted. c) A Provincial Lay Council is to be established in a province. Its members are elected by the fraternities, and it is regulated by the rules laid down in the Directory. It belongs to this Council to elect a Provincial President.

21. At Fraternity Level

a) A local fraternity is governed by a President with his/her Council. They are fully responsible for the government and administration of the fraternity.

b) The Council is elected for the length of time and in the manner laid down by the particular directories. The President is elected by the Councillors from the members of the Council.

c) The Religious Promoter (brother or sister) helps the members in doctrinal matters and in the spiritual life. He/she is appointed by the Prior Provincial after consulting with the provincial Promoter and the local Lay Council.

22. National and International Council

a) Where there are several provinces of the Order within one national boundary, a National Council may be established, according to the rules laid down in particular directories.

b) Similarly there can be an International Council if it is deemed useful after consultation with the fraternities of the whole Order.

23. The Councils of the fraternities can send proposals and petitions to the Provincial Chapter of the Friars Preachers; and likewise Provincial and National Councils to a General Chapter. Some who carry responsibilities in the fraternities should be invited and welcomed to such chapters, to treat of matters which concern the laity.

24. Statutes of the Fraternities

The statutes governing the Lay Fraternities of Saint Dominic are:

- a) The Rule of the Fraternities (fundamental constitution of the Dominican Laity, Rules of Life, Administration of Fraternities);
- b) General Declarations of the Master or of General Chapters;
- c) Particular Directories.

GENERAL DECLARATIONS

- 1.** The statutes by which the chapters of the Dominican Laity are governed is the basic law for all chapters in the world. The General Declarations which are promulgated by the General Chapter are explanations and interpretations of the statutes. The Constitutions, either provincial or national, which are prepared by the promoters and the laity and approved by the Master of the Order, are particular norms for a territory (cf Mexico City 1992, n. 201).
- 2.** Whereas the members embrace their obligations "not as slaves under the law, but as free men under grace", it is here declared that individual transgressions do not constitute a moral fault.
- 3.** Superiors of Chapters, i.e., Chaplain, President, or Council, as appropriate in each case, may legitimately dispense from individual regulations of the statutes of Constitutions, either temporarily or permanently, if this seems suitable.
- 4.** Provincials have power to validate invalid acts of a chapter, especially about admission to profession.
- 5.** Besides chapters of the laity, to which the present Rule applies, there are chapters of priests which are governed by special norms.
- 6.** Individual Constitutions should determine, among other matters:
 - a. the requirements for admission to a chapter;
 - b. the length of time for probation and profession;
 - c. the frequency for the sacraments and the daily prayers to be said by members;
 - d. the frequency and character of chapter meetings and occasions for spiritual renewal;
 - e. the organisation within a chapter and between the chapters of a Province or a nation;
 - f. the method of electing all officials, except for those matters already determined in the Rule;
 - g. the method for, and limitations on, dispensations;
 - h. the prayers to be offered for deceased members and for the whole Order.
- 7.** The Rosary, which leads to a familiar contemplation of the mysteries of Christ under the guidance of Mary, is a traditional devotion in the Order. Dominican Laity are strongly encouraged to pray it daily.