

Dominicans of Peace: SWOT synthesis of the Reflection Circles

Guiding Principles

- Seeking and Preaching Truth: The need for seeking truth in our world was a comment that was mentioned throughout the conversation.
- Being a presence...knowing our own truth and being present to others.
- Trust in the Spirit: "Never underestimate the power of God's spirit in us, through us and despite of us!"
- Contemplative importance in our charism of searching for Truth
- Be persistent in preaching truth and working in hope to bring the Dominican Charism into the world
- Continue to focus on contemplation and the 4 pillars
- Deepen the commitment to truth through community, study and ministry including call to action.
- Meet the 'other' 'stranger' in a reflective listening and dialogue
- More spirituality discussion. How is it fostered and formed (that is foundation to our preaching in our living)?
- Dominic responded to the immediate need before him: to form the converted heretic women in to a viable Catholic group of dedicated women. He tells us to "listen to and respond to what is right before you: reading the signs of the times.
- We must always be bearers of the Good News.
- He encourages us to engage creative leadership
- we are so very aware of the diminishment of our vowed Sisters and the effort to remain positive as we wait for how God is moving us forward:" See, I am making all things new" (Isaiah - as we are reading during this Advent time)
- Following in Dominic's footsteps, we need to adapt to the times in order to preach truth in a secular world.
- As the world seeks truth and goodness, we are called to engage others by using diverse ways of teaching and preaching the truth.
- Sustained by prayer and contemplation, we must act in order to right the wrongs in the world.
- Express common clarity of Dominican charism as expressed in the 4 pillars

Strengths/Gifts

- Dialogue and the ability to express differences is a gift from a St. Dominic.
- The emphasis on associates. The reflection circle was appreciative that comments from leadership mentioned the role of associates so positively.
- Presence and Witness
- Universality of the Dominican charism
- Hopefulness in spite of diminishing resources
- The vision and charism is future oriented
- In light of the ages of our Sisters, the number of sponsored ministries we are involved in.
- Contemplation provides focus and quiet-time
- Willingness to be visible and vocal – bravely preaching in varied ways (e.g. videos)
- Passion for learning and encouraging meaningful study
- The search for truth that flows from our contemplation
- Proclaiming the truth of human dignity and inclusivity: respect for all people and faiths
- Our work for peace and willingness to speak truth to power

- Contemplation as an act of the heart and mind leads to self-knowledge and community, an openness to one's self and to others; it leads to intellectual development & the pursuit of study
- Intellectual integrity and awareness that our experiences lead to knowledge
- Community, something which our world longs for
- Introspection that leads to our search for God
- We approach the truth, we do not possess it, it is an ongoing search
- Itinerancy allows us to listen to what God wants us to do
- The need and the willingness to collaborate
- Acknowledging that we are all one
- We share a focus on justice issues, including ecology and the impact of climate change
- A shared commitment to love, justice and forgiveness
- Importance of contemplation. The Dominican charism is "search for truth" and the peace within that truth. Contemplative dialogue rooted in study/formation.
- Our charism is the 4 pillars. The gift is dialogue
- The significance of the 4 pillars of Dominican life: community, service (ministry), prayer and study - and how these must be always in balance, (as a car with four tires which are in alignment to move straight ahead!) even though the pillar considered the "leading" aspect may vary with what is needed to do immediately.
- The importance with open dialog among all is a great gift of our Charism. Study is unique to dialogue; study helps us to dialogue.
- We must continue the pursuit of truth and justice; all to be done with Love.
- We-have a true and strong hope for our future
- We are open to prayerful creative change as we move into the future
- The sense of diminishment is inevitable; but the eternal still speaks after something dies.
- Change is hard, but we need to commit to change.
- Openness to all: everyone has a voice.
- We have 800 years of history (and soon 200 years of the Order in the US) let us keep in mind the treasure of the past as we move into the future.
- We know how to deal with conflict resolution with love
- Believing that we can move into the unknown future with joy and love
- The distinctive gifts clustered around (1) communication and being in relationship with others and (2) the needs of the world for hope, truth, and contemplation.
- The Dominican charism calls us to listen and communicate between and among differences in ideology, theology and cultural diversity.
- Universality of the Dominican charism (also Surprise)
- Hopefulness in spite of diminishing resources (also Surprise)
- The vision and charism is future oriented (also Surprise)
- With lay partners, Dominicans will continue to risk responding to the needs of the world.
- From a contemplative stance, Dominicans and their lay partners engage in meaningful communication marked by hope and joy.
- Dominicans build equal relationships and work in meaningful collaboration with lay partners; they confront the stereotypes of religious and clerical privilege.
- The common desire to work collaboratively as a global sisterhood, whether we are in the governmental structure or not

Weaknesses (Internal challenges)

- There seemed to be an over-emphasis on the young – an emphasis on planning without trusting in the future...“leave it to God!”
- Age of members
- We were surprised by the demographics in general.
- Only 4% of the OPs in the US are under 60
- In light of the ages of our Sisters, the number of sponsored ministries we are involved in
- As the demographics indicated, we see the need for building all aspects of the Dominican population.
- There is a need for collective grieving for what we are losing
- Many newer members have questions about the reality of the congregation in the future
- We must create a new paradigm where less numbers does not equal less impact
- The importance of charism development. Some of the associates felt they struggled with the charism because it was not articulated as strongly during their formation as associates. They sought out resources.
- Low (2%) view of associate’s role as a strength in futuring the charism – a question??
- We have to stop thinking of old ways of doing things & old structures
- There is a need to focus on and make the time for meaningful formation of boards/councils through a meaningful online presence
- Associate formation must include an outreach to other cultures
- Questions of how we do formation of sisters and associates. Is there too much reliance of past?
- Relationship with Associates to the Congregation...Is there the same sense of charism?

Opportunities – Ways forward – Internal and External

- Since permission for lay preaching has been granted, it must be utilized
- The importance of including preaching as our gift to the Church—even though we are very visible to others in justice, the idea of preaching sometimes is lost.
- We must embrace new forms of communication in order to form community across the globe
- The need for contemplation in our world today and identifying new ways (e.g. videos, meaningful and professional social media presence) to share the fruits of our contemplation with others.
- Develop use of electronic media in a variety of ways to ensure ongoing connection of those who are/were associated through sponsored institutions. Also look for programs like Theology on Tap.
- Use personal contact and social media more effectively to spread the Good News
- Build up the US and universal organizations as places for collaboration and connections.
- We are called to maximize relationships in order to respond to the needs of the world.
- There is a need to balance mission and maintenance
- Let’s keep the structures we have if they serve us well. When they no longer work, evolve new ones from our experiences rooted in love, truth and beauty. We can do a lot more than we can imagine (e.g. an alternative way to preach to the people than the pulpit is the internet. How can we use this resource even more judiciously to bring Good News to others?)
- Find ways to incorporate the new energy and address the new challenges brought by associates

- Associates must be challenged to live the charism as expressed by and in conversation with the Congregation
 - Associates are both independent and interdependent – formation for community, including being shown opportunities for community, must be included in the discernment program
 - More of a focus on associates.
 - How we will incorporate the Associates in spreading our Dominican charism.
 - Partner with Associates to give them guidance, knowledge, resources and freedom to further our charism.
 - The partnering of vowed religious and lay community
 - Identifying strategies for providing meaningful formation of boards, lay partners, and Dominican associates.
 - How we will use our Dominican charism to empower the laity to become good leaders.
 - Importance of making sure those associated with sponsored institutions understand charism.
 - Develop the formation for lay partners
 - The creation of student preaching communities at universities would be beneficial
 - There is a need for contemplative time
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- Maintaining a focus on justice and peace – how do we work for peace and justice in our current culture and context?
 - Future challenge—leadership..how to encourage leadership skills; different model (team concept)
 - Explore a rural model for interdependence and connection on both global and local levels.
 - Provide more information on developing young people in their faith
 - We should be ‘widening the tent’, while being open to change and remaining true to ourselves
 - As we cooperate and collaborate among Dominican groups and others where we live, do it both for the project’s sake and as a model for the world of cooperation & collaboration instead of competition
 - We must have an emphasis on collaboration
 - The hope of the 21st century is to continue to empower women and children, to engage the half of humanity that so far has been underrepresented and underutilized.

Threats

- Resources and time to discuss the importance of dialogue and ways to discuss our differences in times of “fake news”

Challenges/questions

- We were surprised by the diversity of sponsored institutions with so few sisters.
- The large number of sponsored schools and literacy centers ???

Comments on the process:

- Contrast between responses of leadership teams and DWA. Very little recognition in Leadership section of value of Associates.

- The low level of importance or prominence of the associate relationship in Dominican congregations.
- The Associates were not acknowledged as a significant strength in futuring our charism.
- Although Associates account for 77% of lay involvement in Congregations, they only comprised 2% of strengths brought to futuring the charism.
- Little mention of rights of women
- The reflection circle was appreciative that comments from leadership mentioned the role of associates so positively.
- Preaching and contemplative stance labelled as 4th on the list of strengths
- The graphs and comments confirmed what we already knew.
- There were no statistics on the global sisters we are to partner with