

## Springfield Dominicans: SWOT Synthesis of Reflection Circles

### Guiding principles or Identity statements – We are Dominican women called to....

- ❖ Imitate Dominic's sensitivity to the needs of his time: Gospel values, search for truth, prophetic capacity to read signs of the time, recognize and acknowledge the good
- ❖ Collaboration is key. We can't do it alone. We were not meant to do it alone. Learn to recognize that we are ONE. Eliminate artificial boundaries. BE presence of God's Love, Compassion, Peace.
- ❖ To live the Holy Preaching authentically: With compassion, mutuality, openness and integrity; As Dominican family; As a listening presence, inviting others to Truth, not hitting them over the head with it
- ❖ Being "with" the people-living a Christ-centered life in which we interact with those who are different: Lead society, not follow society; speaking truth; Being vs. doing: both are necessary; preachers; respectful dialogue; Being hopeful; bring something new with joy
- ❖ Use the four pillars to ground us in our itinerary that is to leave behind what is no longer useful and move forward.
- ❖ An integrity of life grounded in the Word, preached in word/action and supported by faith and prayer is key to the continued emergence of the Dominican Charism.
- ❖ Today Dominic's passion for Truth invites us deeper into the painful reality of those diminished by religious, monetary, racial, and sexual inequities; it challenges us to live into the truth about ourselves as we comfort the afflicted and condemn the causes of their pain. (A Vision statement)
- ❖ Continue reflection the on the four pillars of Prayer, Study, Community and Preaching and how these relate to the context of these times. E.g. Natural disasters, violence, political unrest, need for hope and courage in the face of change
- ❖ Go! To be itinerant, to listen, to risk-together.

### Strengths

- ✓ We are much more the same than different
- ✓ The choice of intentional collaboration
- ✓ Our challenges across congregations are similar and deepen our solidarity/unity
- ✓ The charism is being nurtured and futured; The "both/and;" Religious life is changing and there is hope
- ✓ the prevalence of Literacy Centers, high schools and ecology centers across the 18 communities
- ✓ How dedicated to the mission the Sisters are and how much the Dominican charism is loved
- ✓ A truly significant thing was the breadth and depth of our ministries with their strong impetus/concern for the preaching mission
- ✓ Awareness of truth as our mandate and motto
- ✓ Radical preaching of the Word from the depths of our being
- ✓ A welcoming spirit regarding other cultures
- ✓ We were pleasantly surprised by our common desire to collaborate using the 4 pillars as a foundation to pursue giving to others the fruit of our contemplation by designing and launching new models/ paradigms for the Holy Preaching
- ✓ What is significant is that participants, lay and religious, grounded in our 800 years of Dominican Tradition desire to propel us forward in new and diverse ways. We are continually called to discern truth as it relates to the message of love, compassion, mercy and inclusion
- ✓ Our realization that the strength of the DSC congregational age demographics lies in the

wisdom that comes from the freedom our elders have.

### **Weaknesses (internal challenges)**

- ❖ What was surprising was the optimism in the videos and remarks as well as the contrast between wanting collaboration and being open to others sharing our charism, but the lack of openness to new forms of religious life.
- ❖ Also surprising was that congregations by and large don't view associates as a strength.
- ❖ Age disparity; how many sisters are advanced age
- ❖ Knowing the cultural challenges we experience with our Sisters from Peru. We need lots of help in understanding and accepting other cultures.
- ❖ The reality of diminishment and the amount of energy directed toward
- ❖ Maintenance
- ❖ How quickly communities have aged; how similar the demographics are for the 18 communities
- ❖ The graphic statistics were striking. To see the stark reality of aging in concrete terms highlighted the meaning of diminishment.
- ❖ We are challenged to find collaborative models for mission outreach other than the sponsored institution model.
- ❖ The Dominican Sisters Conference congregations' age demographics were surprising and significant.

### **Opportunities (i.e. concrete ideas for situations/needs to address in the world outside the cong)**

- Focus on ministry to families
- Possible need for a "think tank" to look at a structure for intentional collaboration (possibly using CAM model for legacy/collaboration) (Springfield)
- Learn skill of listening to learn, not to respond
- Wider and more effective use of social media (both internal and external?)
- Dominic's passion for truth is sorely needed today. It's essential not just in areas of critical thinking, to recognize fake news and combat electronic manipulation, but to draw us into the deeper truth of listening and loving that accepts self and others as loved by God with all our strengths and limitations. It's from there we are able to preach the truth with love wherever we are.
- What is the heresy today? In the face of the needs of today, how can we continue to radically preach the Word from the depths of our being?
- Dominic understood the signs of the time and set out to meet them. Different signs of the time, no less urgent, are calling out to Dominicans in the U.S. today. We believe that Dominic was telling us to see the poor around and among us; to discern what they need most; and to set about doing what we can, based on our physical ability and our health, to alleviate the needs of the poor and all who are marginalized in our society.
- We are at a point in time when we must emphasize doing as well as dialoging. Everyone can "make a difference"; nothing is too small. This "making a difference" may necessitate a reassessment of how we use some of our buildings and space.
- Dominic sold what was valuable to him in order to help the poor; can we do any less?

### **Internal opportunities (i.e. identified need and response)**

- ✓ Recognizing the untapped resources of our associates and allowing them to become a strength
- ✓ What is the role of Associates? Being/doing – how do we create that 'both/and'?

- ✓ Associates could more formally participate in inviting others as vowed members or associates.
- ✓ OP Associates/Laity (partners) are a tremendous untapped resource: Greater collaboration with our OP Associates
- ✓ To transform our way of thinking / to be intentional in the ways we partner and minister together (religious and lay) and creatively share leadership.
- ✓ Tapping into the strength of the Dominican family, including the Nuns and the Friars
- ✓ Bridging the gap between collaboration and others sharing our charism and the openness to new forms of religious life
- ✓ Large number of Sisters in education, shown on the graph, is so much broader than just in schools. We must evangelize ourselves at the same time or before we can evangelize others.
- ✓ Availability of and redistribution of financial resources
- ✓ Wider and more effective use of social media
- ✓ Concern for visibility in the larger community that attracts new vowed members and mission partners e.g. associates. (Some thought visibility might include a return to wearing the traditional habit. Others thought visibility would be enhanced by creating more sponsored institutions.)
- ✓ Increased efforts for collaboration (communion) with the now autonomous Dominican congregations and the associates attached to them.
- ✓ Continued conversation
- ✓ Share our lives with each other (Remember the Dominican Alliance provided congregations the opportunities to interact with each other and get to know each other's Congregational history.)
- ✓ Learn from each other by sharing presentations for formation and continuing education. How might we pray and study with each other?
- ✓

### **Threats – Signs of the times?**

- Little notion of permanent commitment of any kind
- Differing models of church
- An earlier, but still existent, notion of consecrated life as a "privileged" vocation
- We feel challenged to communicate to young women that their career/professional pursuits are not necessarily contrary to living the consecrated life, but might well be integrated into their gift of self.
- Prior to the post-war period, the only “jobs” available for women outside the home were primarily teaching and nursing, and many of them turned to religious life to fulfill their desire to serve others. From the post-war period up to the present time, job opportunities for women and girls have increased exponentially, and it is no longer necessary to enter religious life to follow a calling to serve others in one of the myriad occupational fields which are now open to them.
- Outreach to the poor and marginalized that is better organized and effective e.g. accomplished through newly created sponsored institutions.
- Going forward together in intentional collaboration, because collaboration teaches us that how we move forward is about relationship, not task.

### **Comments or observations on the process (content/findings)**

- Little mention of retired sisters
- Only 2% answered affirmatively to the 'joy and hope" question
- Disappointment of the sign of Joy and Hope was 2% on "The strengths your congregation brings to futuring our charism."
- Some associates were surprised to learn that not all OP congregations have associates and that others involve their associates in leadership positions within the congregation.
- No mention of collaborating with Dominican laity, Dominican priests and brothers
- No snapshot information from our Sisters/partners in Africa
- The number of sisters involved in each ministry is not reported in the Snapshots
- In spite of the international character of this study, the comments did not always seem to reflect a diversity of perspectives
- There was no mention of our Peruvian sisters. What will occur in their lives as we plan our future?
- Literacy centers rank as the most numerous among our sponsored institutions. (only a comment – uncertain whether weakness or strength?)
- Sisters in the 70-80 age bracket makeup only one sixth of the entire number of sisters (only a comment – uncertain whether a strength or weakness?)
- We don't hear ourselves being aware of racism and colonialism in this process
- A desire to identify and stay aware of how racism/colonialism influences the way we go forward.
- How is it that we have difficulty naming our strengths, but can easily name our challenges.

### **Observations on the process:**

- More information about underlying assumptions of the project itself
- Snapshot of U.S. congregations as a whole to financially go through with a project.
- There seemed to be a significant difference between what sisters said and what the laity said. The sisters seemed to be more abstract and the laity concrete.
- As mentioned above, the Sisters seemed abstract in their sharing about futuring the charism. Having concrete ideas would have been helpful
- It would have been helpful to have a better understanding of the context of this project.
- At the end of the gathering, we realized that we easily got into discussion rather than reflective dialog which wasn't helpful to achieving the desired goal.
- We all agreed it was a good experience and with practice we could get better at reflective dialog.
- Make the plan practical
- What was missing was that we need an understanding of the culture and needs of the African countries so we can support each other We also need the inclusion of participants who represent other Dominican congregations in the United States such as Nashville, Ann Arbor and the Nuns.
- We had insufficient knowledge of research design to be able to accurately interpret the graphs and data provided
- What was listed as "U.S. Dominican Congregational statistics" is inaccurate; the research sample does not include all U.S. Dominican congregations. It should be named for what it is: DSC congregational statistics