

# Dominican Laity: Basic Information

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Moderator: Rachel Meyer  
Formation Director: Nancy Rowland

Hosted on Zoom  
rachelmeyer316@gmail.com (505) 393-1152  
nancy.r.rowland@gmail.com (301) 775-0609

## Laity in Religious Orders

- Religious orders have always had associated lay members: Franciscan, Dominican, Benedictine, Carmelite, etc. They are true, formal, valued members with a proper place within the jurisdiction and mission of their orders.
- These communities were formerly known, or are known elsewhere, as “tertiary” or “third order” members. Same thing, updated name.
- Membership in a religious order is membership in a big family, past and present.
- Belonging to an order’s laity is not a club, ministry, study group or prayer group. It is a lifelong commitment to an ordering of one’s life. It is a vocation from God.
- These communities today very nicely fulfill the ideals of the Second Vatican Council and the needs of the modern Church.

## The Dominican Charism

- Charism: The particular spirituality, personality, gifts and mission of a religious organization. What makes them unique.
- The purpose of a Dominican vocation is primarily one’s own sanctification, and secondarily the salvation of other souls. Dominican life is ordered toward growth in holiness.
- Dominicans are the “Order of Preachers.” The order was founded with that mission: to bring contemplative, educated, holy religious to preach the gospel to Christians being led into heresy and out of the church. Preaching is the fundamental Dominican *apostolate*.
- *Veritas*, “Truth,” is the Dominican motto. The mission is first to know the Truth, that is, Christ, and then to bring that Truth to others.
- “To contemplate and to give to others the fruits of contemplation” is another Dominican motto. Dominicans are contemplative *and* active in ministry. Contemplation is the essential source of meaningful preaching.

## The Four Pillars of Dominican Life

### *Prayer*

- Dominican prayer is liturgical. Mass and Liturgy of the Hours are central to the Dominican prayer life.
- Dominican prayer is contemplative. The Dominican must be daily in a deep, personal relationship with God. Contemplation is not a formal or vocal prayer, but a loving attentiveness to God, in Scripture, in the Eucharist, or just in the heart.
- The Rosary is Dominican in origin. Saint Dominic is said to have received it personally from Mary. He certainly is responsible for the concrete form we know of the Rosary and its popularization. Dominicans have always been deeply devoted to Mary.
- Dominicans are particularly devoted to prayers for the deceased, especially deceased Dominicans and their friends and families. Many Dominicans were initially motivated to join the order for the assurance of an abundance of prayers after death.

## *Study*

- “Assiduous study of sacred truth,” in other words, constant, eager study of Scripture, theology, the teachings and life of the Church, is one of the essential elements in a Dominican life.
- Study of divine truth leads to intimacy with God. It also prepares the Dominican to preach, to be able to answer even difficult questions and to correct misconceptions.
- The first Dominican communities were clustered around the great universities of the 13th and 14th century Europe, and many of the first members were drawn from professors and lawyers.

## *Community*

- A Dominican life is always lived in a community. The goal is to become “of one heart and mind,” to truly share life together. In community, Dominicans support one another in their prayer, study and preaching, as well as in the joys and difficulties of life generally.
- The Rule is the document that shapes, defines and describes the shared life of the community. It includes specific instructions for the group and each individual. It was very important to Dominic that falling short of the rule never be made or considered a sin or moral failing - the rule is meant to lift and encourage, never to bind or punish.
- Dominican governance has always been democratic, which was revolutionary at the time. Positions of leadership at all levels are considered a service, are chosen by the community and are temporary.
- The Order is a single, unified, organized worldwide body including friars, nuns/sisters, and laity, all governed by the Master General and divided into regions and provinces.
- New Mexico is part of the Central Province of the United States, which also includes area from Colorado to Michigan.
- Lay communities meet together at least monthly to pray, have fellowship/social time, participate in group study, conduct chapter business and otherwise support one another.

## *Preaching*

- Preaching is not limited to Mass, or even lecturing to a group. Preaching encompasses anything that we do to bring the Truth of Christ to others.
- Every lay Dominican has an apostolate, which means a particular work or ministry to others, which can take on many forms.

## **Formation**

- Formation is several years long. The goal is to bring the new member gradually and fully into the Dominican life and way of prayer, study and preaching, and to fully incorporate them into the local and worldwide community. A formation director guides the process, but it is the new member who really does the work of the formation. There is a formal structure and a curriculum, but formation is very individual.
- Inquiry: The first step. For about six months those with an interest in the Dominican laity meet regularly to learn about the various aspects of Dominican life and get to know the community. A time of discernment.
- Candidacy I: The new member receives the Dominican scapular and begins a year of in-depth study of the Dominican history and charism, saints, Rule, Liturgy of the Hours. S/he participates fully in the life of the community.
- Candidacy II: The member makes a temporary profession of promises to follow the Rule in the community as a lay Dominican for three years. There is continued formation with longer, deeper study of Scripture, Church documents and types of prayer.
- Final profession: The member promises to be a Dominican, follow the Rule and participate in local Dominican community for the rest of his/her life.