In this issue of Voices we celebrate the 800th Anniversary of the Order of Preachers, known more familiarly as the Dominican Order after its founder, St. Dominic.

The celebration actually began in 2006, when the Order marked the 800th anniversary of Dominic’s first foundation – the Monastery of Ste. Marie de Prouilhe in southern France. It became the center of Dominic’s “Holy Preaching,” which aimed to counter the dualism – belief in the goodness of spirit and the evil of material life – of a sect known as Albigensianism, or Catharism, that had gained many adherents. The first Dominicans – followers of the Spanish friar Domingo Guzmán – were women converts.

This issue of Voices looks at our 800+ years of Dominican history through the lens and experience of Dominican women.

We begin with an essay by Sister Nadine Foley, who explores the provocative question, “Do Dominican Women Preach?” Next, Sister Carolyn Roeber – canonist, civil lawyer, and ethicist – shares her insights on what it means to be a Dominican preacher, followed by Sister Joan Delaplane, who reflects on her self-identity as a preacher.

In an essay excerpted from an earlier talk, Sister Carol Johannes discusses our Dominican legacy as “Adrians” and “Dominicans.” We then are offered a pictorial view of the ministerial life of Dominican women in response to urgent issues of our day – the water crisis in Flint, Michigan; a typhoon in the Philippines; war and terrorism in Iraq.

The St. Louis Associates, one of five Sojourners Mission Groups, comprised predominantly of Associates, explore their evolving Dominican identity. And Sister Marilín Llanes and candidate Katherine Frazier share with us what it means to step into religious life as a Dominican Sister in the 21st century.

As we come to the end of the issue, we go back to the beginnings of Dominican life as depicted by Sister Cheryl Liske in a delightful play that introduces us to the pioneer women of Prouilhe and their struggle to remain a part of the new Order of Preachers. We conclude with insights on Dominican history shared by our Racine Dominican Sister and renowned scholar Suzanne Noffke in an interview with Sister Barbara Kelley.

As we celebrate these 800 years of Dominican life, we honor the 5,430 years of commitment of 88 Sisters who this year celebrate 25, 50, 60, 70, and 75 years of vowed life as Dominican Sisters. Jubilate!

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Cover photo: Detail of mosaic by Melville Steinfelds in St. Dominic Chapel, Adrian, Michigan.
Do Dominican Women Preach?
Nadine Foley, OP

This seems a strange question to ask. After all, Dominican women belong to an Order of Preachers and customarily indicate that identity by placing the letters OP after their names. But it has not always been the case. For a long period the Sisters used the initials OSD after their names to indicate that they belonged to the “Order of St. Dominic.”

It might be assumed that the reason for the difference indicated that the Dominican women were attached to the Order but were not preachers as the men of the Order were. In another sense, the usage may have been influenced by the practice of other Orders (the Benedictines used OSB, Order of St. Benedict; the Franciscans, OFM, Order of Friars Minor).

Ten years before founding the Order of Preachers, Dominic had founded a monastery of women at Prouilhe, near Fanjeaux in southern France, to accommodate converts from the Cathari. Respecting the austere life the women had been living, Dominic adapted their way of life to that of contemplative nuns, women who lived an enclosed life and devoted themselves to prayer and support for the journeying friars.

Dominic remained close to the nuns at Prouilhe and they drew inspiration from his tutelage. Through prayer they embraced his mission to counter the heretical ravages being inflicted upon the people of his time. Their status was tenuous, however, even after the Order of Preachers was founded in 1216. It remained for one of Dominic’s successors – Humbert of Romans, fifth Master General from 1254 to 1263 – to straighten things out. Under his leadership, the Sisters of the Order were united under a single set of constitutions and given full membership in the Order of Preachers.¹

The women expressed the charism differently from the men as befitted their times. Yet these early women knew very well that they were The Holy Preaching.²

The women came to constitute the Second Order in a tripartite organization encompassing all who would affiliate for the sake of The Preaching—First Order, friars, both priests and lay brothers; Second Order, nuns; Third Order, lay persons. All of them were committed to a contemplative life in mission; all of them understood themselves as Preachers. Over time, however, as religious men and women took up the practice of using initials after their names to designate their communities, they used “OSD” for “Order of St. Dominic.”

It is unclear when friars instead began to use the initials “OP” to designate their identity as members of the “Order of Preachers.” But it was not until the beginning of the last century that this practice was standardized for the entire Order by Bonaventure de Paredes, Master General from 1926 to 1929. Paredes “urged a strong family spirit among all Dominicans and authorized Dominican Sisters to sign their names O.P.”³ The Adrian Dominicans put this into practice in 1927.

Events in the 19th century brought a new challenge to the women of the Order. In the United States, tens of thousands of immigrants from Europe were arriving. The need for teachers and health care providers was overwhelming. The Sisters responded. Some communities of Dominican Sisters were formed in the United States for that purpose; others came out of the cloister to
VATICAN CITY — Pope Francis has announced he will create a commission to study the possibility of allowing women to serve as deacons in the Catholic church, signaling an historic openness to the possibility of ending the global institution’s practice of an all-male clergy.

The pontiff indicated he would create such a commission during a meeting at the Vatican Thursday with some 900 leaders of the world’s congregations of Catholic women religious, who asked him during a question-and-answer session why the church excludes women from serving as deacons.

The women religious, meeting with the pope as part of the triennial assembly of the International Union of Superiors General (UISG), told Francis that women had served as deacons in the early church and asked: “Why not construct an official commission that might study the question?”

The pope responded that he had spoken about the matter once some years ago with a “good, wise professor” who had studied the use of female deacons in the early centuries of the church. Francis said it remained unclear to him what role such deacons had.

“What were these female deacons?” the pontiff recalled asking the professor. “Did they have ordination or no?”

“It was a bit obscure,” said Francis. “What was the role of the deaconess in that time?”

“Constituting an official commission that might study the question?” the pontiff asked aloud. “I believe yes. It would do good for the church to clarify this point. I am in agreement. I will speak to do something like this.”

“I accept,” the pope said later. “It seems useful to me to have a commission that would clarify this well.”

Francis’ openness to studying the possibility of women serving as deacons could represent an historic shift for the global Catholic church, which does not ordain women as clergy.

Pope John Paul II claimed in his 1994 apostolic letter *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis* that “the Church has no authority whatsoever” to ordain woman as priests, citing Jesus’ choosing of only men to serve as his twelve apostles.

Many church historians have said however that there is abundant evidence that women served as deacons in the early centuries of the church. The apostle Paul mentions such a woman, Phoebe, in his letter to the Romans. …

The pontiff’s words about female deacons were only part of a nearly 75-minute meeting with the members of the International Union of Superiors General, which represents nearly half a million Catholic women religious on five continents.

The women religious asked the pope four notably strong questions, leading with an inquiry on how to better integrate women into the life of the global church.

Quoting the pontiff’s frequent use of the phrase “feminine genius” to describe women’s role in the church, they noted that while the pope uses that phrase “women are excluded from the decision-making processes of the church” and from giving the homily at the Mass.

Francis responded that the integration of women into the life of the church had been “very weak,” and said: “We must go forward.”
number of difficulties with this situation, including the impaired health of Sisters. The matter came to a head, however, over a canonical issue. The ministerial life that thousands of Dominican Sisters were living was incompatible under canon law with the enclosed life of Second Order nuns.

In the late 1800s, Sisters were faced with the painful choice of either giving up their teaching ministries or their status as Second Order nuns. The Sisters chose to continue their ministries, giving up their religious status as Dominican nuns to become Dominican Sisters of the Third Order.

In 1901, the Vatican recognized Third Order Conventual Sisters as religious, and after Vatican II the threefold division of the Order was replaced with a single category – the Dominican Family.

With its call to respond to the signs of the times and for religious to return to “the original inspiration” of their communities, Vatican II opened the door for Sisters to engage in a host of new ministries and to deeper engagement in what it means to be a Dominican “preacher.”

In 1975, the Dominican Leadership Conference initiated a study of the relationship of Dominican women to preaching. Among other things, the study noted, “There has come the collective call to Dominican women not only for ministry … but to preaching and to public confirmation of their ministry.”

Dominican Sisters today have laid claim to the preaching charism of the Order. Dominican women preach retreats and preach in their community chapels, among other places given approval. Though highly educated for teaching and other professions and in many cases trained and capable of delivering a homily within a Mass, that possibility is not theirs on the basis of gender. But there are other ways to preach the Word of God. And, “yes,” Dominican women preach that way.

Since the beginning of the Order, Dominican women have preached with their lives – by the good works they do manifesting the mercy, love, forgiveness, and compassion of Jesus. Pulpit preaching at Eucharistic celebrations, however, remains forbidden to women by the official Church, a fact which continues to suppress the charism of the Order for its female members, as well as the gifts for preaching widely distributed among women.

Sister Nadine Foley, OP, PhD, historian for the Adrian Dominican Sisters, has served as Prioress and General Councilor of the Congregation, as well as President of the Leadership Conference of Women Religious and as U.S. delegate to the International Union of Superiors General.

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Choreography, Improvisation and the Art of Preaching

Carolyn Roeber, OP

Years ago, when I studied choreography and improvisation, I learned the importance of looking beyond preconceived limits and attending to the many perspectives available even on very simple “stages.” As a lawyer and canon lawyer, I knew that the role of law is to provide freedom within accepted structures. I also recognized the importance of perspective in assessing a person’s attitude within structures. However, it was choreography that focused my attention on the elements limiting my thought, and improvisation that opened me to the unexpected.

The attentiveness required for these practices underscored the need to look for the unseen, to recognize the ambiguity of limits, and to test silence. Bringing this awareness to ministry in the Church changed my approach to conversations and decisions. It reminded me to start every engagement by acknowledging my preconceptions and questioning those of others. This need was recently reinforced in a course in facilitative mediation, where we encouraged disputants to identify their interests, rather than their positions, and to recognize each other’s common interests. In my ministry in ethics, I seek to expand discourse beyond the interests of disputants, to embrace the common good of all creation.

As a vowed Dominican woman in a Church which excludes women from many roles and responsibilities, it is a temptation for me to attend only to barriers which exist in practice and in Church law. I am certainly concerned about such exclusions. However, focusing on the interests other people deeply care about, identifying the boundaries separating us, and seeking shared values and interests provides me with the opportunity to broaden my own perspective and the possibility of being heard by people who do not share my perceptions.

My Dominican preaching charism calls me to both seek and speak truth. I have learned that any effort to speak truth, especially to power, requires not only courage, but humility. Without the humility to suspend my own certainty, question my own assumptions, and listen for the truth and integrity of another person’s perspective, I will lack the ability to hear and will undermine my own efforts to be heard.

Through my ministry in Church structures, I have been changed by others and others have been changed by me. I believe that to fruitfully engage the established limits of this “stage,” we must be present on it, encountering and embodying God’s presence. In our conversations and interactions, we are all choreographing and improvising this dance together.

Sister Carolyn Roeber, OP, PhD, (above left) a civil and canon lawyer, serves as Director and Judge of the Metropolitan Seattle Tribunal of the Archdiocese of Seattle. She holds a PhD in ethics.
“When a woman is in labor she has sorrow, because her hour has come; but when she is delivered of the child, she no longer remembers the anguish for joy that a child is born into the world.”

(John 16:21)

For many years now I have used the image of birthing to reflect the joys and challenges of the preacher. Our Dominican brother and mystic, Meister Eckhart, said: “What good is it if Mary gave birth to the Son of God centuries ago if I do not give birth to the Son of God in my time and culture?”

Before becoming a Dominican, I had considered both the Trappestines and Maryknoll. I felt a strong pull toward the simple, contemplative life, and yet the desire to bring the Good News of God’s saving love to others as well. The Dominican motto, “To contemplate and give to others the fruits of one’s contemplation,” seemed to release the tension and bridge the two apparently different urgings into one call.

When I entered the Dominican Order in 1949, however, I would never have called myself a preacher. Since then, I have come to understand preaching as my identity. To be a Dominican, a preacher, one embraces a way of life, a spirituality that is centered in God’s Word, is concerned about truth, is passionate about people, and is convinced that, with the overshadowing of the Holy Spirit, the Word will become flesh anew for God’s people.

All the love, patience, vulnerability, discipline, and toll on the body, mind and spirit that co-creating new life requires is released as joy of the new life emerges. To decide to have a child, says the writer Elizabeth Stone, is “to decide forever to have your heart go walking around outside your body” – an apt description for the preacher called to bring the Word to birth.

In Mark 1:38, Jesus says, “Let us go to the neighboring towns so I can preach there, too, for that is why I came!” Truly, Jesus walked around with his great heart outside his body in compassion for the sick and suffering, but especially for those who were hungry for truth, love, and forgiveness. To Jesus, “they were like sheep without a shepherd” (Matthew 9:36). Dominicans are called to remind all those baptized into the mission and ministry of Jesus of our joy and challenge to preach the Good News of God’s saving love in word and in deed.

Sister Joan Delaplane, OP, (left) is a professor emerita at Aquinas Institute of Theology, a Dominican school of theology in St. Louis, Missouri, where she began teaching homiletics in 1977. She directs retreats, conducts workshops on preaching, and offers spiritual direction.
Sister Carol Johannes, OP, is a spiritual director and former Prioress of the Congregation. This essay was excerpted from a talk she gave to representatives of the Congregation’s Sponsored Institutions at a gathering in March 2015.

We begin by asking what spirit those of us who entered the Congregation discovered when we entered it. Let’s start with the most obvious ingredient that brought our legacy to life: the particular group of women that God “called together to share faith and life with one another.”

While other Congregations of Sisters offered their new members time to learn the expectations of religious life, we learned how to live the life by actually living it. We prayed the choral Office with the community four times a day. We studied at the College. We maintained the campus, scrubbing, dusting and polishing the Chapel, the Motherhouse, the Academy, the College. While at times this seemed a bit much, we generally were more than willing to do it all because we saw that not just the neophytes but all the Sisters worked like this. There was no service class. And most of all, Adrian Sisters always seemed so happy. Their joy was obvious, attractive and contagious. And I only learned later that joy is a mark of holiness, most especially, a mark of Dominican holiness.

It’s almost impossible to describe our legacy without some reference to Mother Gerald Barry, whose time in leadership lasted almost 30 years. During the years she governed us, the Congregation underwent amazing growth, and to a great extent, her leadership shaped our character and spirit. Mother Gerald’s desire to spread the good news of the Gospel motivated all her decisions. She often insisted that there was nothing that we could not accomplish with the help of God’s grace, the support of the community, and our own hard work. Sometimes we failed. But it is somewhat astounding how often her expectations were met.

Mother Gerald’s trust in her Sisters moved her to send many, many of us to universities all over the country to obtain graduate degrees in any number of disciplines to make us competent teachers. We weren’t confined to the study of science, mathematics, and the humanities, but Sisters who showed talent in the arts were also sent on to study. Through her vision, we all learned that a love of beauty fostered a contemplative spirit.

Mother Gerald bequeathed to us a spirit of compassion. As stern as we were drawn to religious life because the Sisters exuded so much joy.

I considered entering two Congregations. One projected the sense that life was a pretty grim proposition. And then there were the Dominican Sisters of Adrian. I thought the grimmer group may well have been holier, but the Mother Gerald’s [center] leadership shaped our character and spirit.
she could sometimes be, her heart melted when she was confronted with someone in critical need. Compassion is hardly unique in the Christian tradition, but it surely is present in ours.

Up to now, we’ve been focusing on the “Adrian” part of our title. With the coming of Vatican II, when asked to reexamine the original charism of our Founder, we began to focus on the second, the “Dominican” part. We had always revered St. Dominic, but now we began to appreciate his immense holiness and wholeness. We learned that much of the spirit we thought was “Adrian” was actually derived from our Dominican roots.

Many saintly founders of religious congregations adopted accretions of piety in their practices that were not derived from the Gospel. They were a residue of old reformist mandates. We inherited some of this, living apart with an emphasis on guilt, reparation, and keeping track of our offenses against religious observance, but it never “took” in us very deeply. Imagine our joy and sense of freedom when we discovered that this culture was not Dominican! It was a much later development, certainly not an essential part of Dominican life, and could, even should, be dispensed with.

As a young Canon of St. Augustine, Dominic accompanied Bishop Diego on a diplomatic mission to southern France. They found a Church mired in scandal, badly in need of reform, and starving for spiritual nourishment. Because of a lack of authentic and life-giving preaching, the faithful fell into the negative cult of the old Manichaean heresy, regarding the whole material world as the realm of the devil. The heretics were called Cathars, and the heresy itself, Albigensian, because of its prevalence in the city of Albi.

Diego and Dominic witnessed the practice of extreme asceticism, the embrace of severe penitential practices, and the conviction that salvation was a pretty remote possibility. Understandably, they were alarmed and distressed at how people’s lives were being ruined by a creed that was patently false. Their compassion moved them to remain and share the healing truth of the Gospel. On the way to Spain to resign his See, however, Bishop Diego became ill and died, leaving Dominic alone to take on the challenging evangelizing task.

Dominic did not hate the world. He was totally at home in it. He went out into the midst of the people with enthusiasm and generosity: walking from town to town, singing at the top of his voice, praising God, preaching his heart out. He approached the heretics with understanding, listening non-defensively to their complaints about the scandalous wealth of the Church and the behavior of some of its leaders and clergy. He took special care to embrace a simple life style: going from town to town on foot, making do with very little, practicing mendicancy himself, and mandating it for his followers. His interaction with the heretics was always marked by pastoral sensitivity.
Dominic was the first religious Founder to see that the Church needed preachers who were, at once, steeped in union with God fostered by the contemplative tradition, but also active, competent theologically, and able to take the fruits of their contemplation as preachers to people who hungered for them.

Dominic established centers of study at many of the great universities of Europe, and sent the friars to receive the best theological education possible to prepare them to preach well. He introduced the unique practice of dispensing the friars from praying the Divine Office and carrying out other duties if they needed the time for study.

Dominic was also well known for his graciousness and respect for women, who figure prominently in the early stories of the Order. The first Sisters were converts from Catharism, and we’re told that Dominic took great care to instruct and provide for them.

He founded several monasteries of contemplative women and considered them as friends and partners in his mission. He visited the nuns whenever he could – at one point carrying wooden spoons with him for many miles to present them as gifts to nuns at one monastery.

And so, we have in Dominic a rich and holy heritage, still alive and flourishing today, despite the fact that our Founder left us absolutely no formal instructions. Doesn’t it seem remarkable, that after nearly a millennium, there’s still interest and energy generated by a person who lived in another culture, a distant century, held no ecclesiastical position of power, and left no written works? What kind of person can be present and vital long after popes and kings are dust in our memories?

In this respect, doesn’t Dominic perhaps remind us a little of Jesus of Nazareth himself? We know that the survival of Christianity doesn’t lie in anything Jesus wrote or any kind of system or structure he left behind. The wonder is what people experienced in Jesus, and how that experience, having been passed on through the centuries, is still very much alive today.

And so it is with Dominic. Those who followed him never forgot how they experienced him. They wanted to be like him, to enjoy the friendship with God he enjoyed, to do what he did, to share in his preaching mission of a God who is only love and mercy, and to make the difference in people’s lives that he made. Not unlike all of us, who experienced Dominic’s contemporary daughters in Adrian, and wanted to be like them, and to be one of them.
Preaching on the Frontlines

Over the centuries, Dominican Sisters have preached with their lives, responding to the needs of the people in their local communities. From time to time, this has meant being on the frontlines of local, regional, or national emergencies.

Toxic Water in Flint, Michigan

“Tests have shown that our zip code, 48504, is one of the areas with the highest amount of lead in the water,” said Sister Carol Weber, OP, Director of the St. Luke’s N.E.W. Life Center in Flint, Michigan. A massive failure of state and federal oversight led to the poisoning of the water in Flint. The N.E.W. Life Center soon became a distribution center for bottled water, and has now begun to implement longer-term programs to address the crisis, including a nutrition and support group for pregnant women and mothers of small children. The women receive food boxes, along with information on how to prepare nutritious meals for their children that can help counteract the effects of lead poisoning. Plans are underway to open a Head Start/Great Start Readiness program.

Sister Carol Weber (left and bottom far right) noted after meeting with President Obama: “I left the experience feeling a great sense of hope with an urgency to continue to provide healing and nutrition education with the nutrients people need to move forward.”

Photo: Ryan Garza/Detroit Free Press
Natural Disasters in the Philippines

Our Filipina Sisters of Our Lady of Remedies Mission Chapter have responded time and again to natural disasters. When Mount Pinatubo erupted in 1991, the Sisters ministered to the farming families that had been displaced by the volcano. Twenty-five years later, they continue to accompany these farming communities in ministry. More recently, in November 2013, the Sisters mobilized in support of thousands of people afflicted by Typhoon Haiyan. In addition to offering spiritual and material support, the Sisters helped the people re-establish livelihoods by planting vegetables and 1,000 fruit trees. “Life is stronger than death, and when people work together, they have a brighter future,” said Sister Zenaida S. Nacpil, OP, Chapter Prioress.

Displaced by War in Iraq

The Dominican Sisters of St. Catherine of Siena, in Iraq, continue to work to address the overwhelming needs of the Christians and other minority peoples with whom, in August 2014, they fled the onslaught of ISIS terrorists, who occupied their towns and villages in the Nineveh Plain. Living themselves as “Internally Displaced People” in Kurdish Iraq, the Sisters have responded to the critical needs by opening an elementary school and three kindergartens, offering displaced children an education and the stability of a daily routine. They also opened two healthcare clinics and hope to open a trauma healing center and a high school. A key challenge they face daily is addressing the spiritual needs of their people.

“Pray for us so that we may have the courage to announce the Lord’s resurrection in our worn-out community in Iraq,” Sister Maria Hanna, OP, Prioress, wrote at Easter 2016.

The Sisters also urge that we work to stop the global arms trade, which supplies the weapons that wreak such violence.
Returning to Dominican Life
Marilín Llanes, OP

What draws me to continue emerging as a 21st Century woman returning to live vowed life in our world today? I begin my day with a “yes” to God, our Creator, actively listening to the Christ within, taking time to reflect and to respond to what I hear, so that I can go out into the world and make a positive difference in the lives of others. I seek daily to be in solidarity with the poor, the people on the margins, and to challenge the systems that maltreat, overpower, and persecute the rights of all natural life.

Pope Francis’ compelling call to religious in his Apostolic Letter, *To All Consecrated People on the Occasion of the Year of Consecrated Life*, resonates with my commitment: “It is not enough to read it, nor is it enough to meditate on it. Jesus asks us to practice it, to put words into effect in our lives.” Yes, I believe and proclaim it is a sacred privilege for me to live in our world today as a vowed religious woman.

What challenges do I face and what fruits do I gain from living out my Dominican preaching charism as a woman in our Church today? This communal commitment calls me to be a responsible steward in keeping alive our Dominican heritage and being a co-creator of the future as it unfolds each day.

How can I be this radical presence? For me, it is not enough to be settled and content with where I live and with whom I share community. My call is to be creative with, where, and how communal connections happen in my life. A challenge for me this year has been balancing the unique and diverse demands of community, ministry, and personal reflection time. Daily I enter into the silence, stillness, and dialogue with my Beloved and it is through this experience that I feel ready to embrace the day and all that it holds. I rely on an amazing circle of women, my dear Adrian Dominican Sisters, trusting that together we can be a challenging beacon of hope for each other and the world.

Sister Marilín Llanes, OP, professed her first vows in April 2016 after entering the discernment process for Readmission in August 2015. A native of Cuba, she was a member of the Adrian Dominican Congregation from 1988 to 1995. She currently ministers as a school psychologist for the Joliet (Illinois) School District.

Sister Marilín Llanes (center) professes vows to Prioress Attracta Kelly, witnessed by Sisters Mary Jane Lubinski and Rosa Monique Peña.
I believe that being a Dominican in the 21st Century must be grounded in our call to preach, and I have found inspiration for how to integrate this call into my own life from Jesus’ words in Matthew 28:19: “Go therefore, and make disciples of all nations.”

Being Dominican means that I am called to live these words in three ways. First, these words remind me that our mission is global, calling me to enter into relationship with people all over the world, including our global Dominican family. The presence of my Dominican sisters and brothers in places as varied as Iraq, the Dominican Republic and the Philippines, continuously calls me into attentiveness to the needs of my global family.

Secondly, the Dominican mission compels me to go to the margins, wherever they are, whether in distant countries or here in the United States. The poor were the people to whom Jesus ministered, and we, as members of the body of Christ, are called to remain faithful to them. In Mary’s Song, God lifts up the lowly, and we share in this good news whenever we give people tools to improve their lives.

Third, I see in this verse from Matthew a mission to accompany others in their faith journey and to share the good news of the Gospel with them. God became a human named Jesus who walked on the Earth. By this action, God showed us that all of us are worthy of love, no matter what size, shape, or color we may be, and affirmed the dignity of all people and of the Earth.

This is truly good news! This is the good news that so overwhelmed Mary Magdalene with joy and wonder at the empty tomb that she had to run to the disciples to share it, and which overwhelms me with joy when I share in the good news of the lives of the people with whom I minister. This is what it means to be a Dominican in the 21st Century and in every century: to be so overwhelmed with love of God and joy in the Gospel that we must share that love and joy with others.

Katherine Frazier entered the Adrian Dominican Congregation in August 2015 as a candidate. Before entering, she served as coordinator of Bishop Donald Trautman Catholic House at Gannon University in Erie, Pennsylvania. She hails from Fort Wayne, Indiana.
“As we each shared what was most important to us as Associates, what we saw our role to be, and how we envisioned our future as Adrian Associates, there was certainly a strong commonality, but also a bond and certainty that we know who we are,” writes Associate Carol Johnson about a process that led the Associates of St. Louis, Missouri, to draft their own identity statement as Adrian Dominican Associates.

The St. Louis Sojourners group is made up exclusively of 12 Associates. The four Adrian Dominican Sisters who had been part of the group joined other Mission Groups after they moved away from the St. Louis area. One of them, Sister Joan Delaplane, continues to play a vital role in the group’s life, participating in their monthly meetings through Skype and offering Spring and Fall days of retreat in St. Louis.

During discussions about the distinct role of Associates, stimulated by the General Chapter 2016 discernment process, the St. Louis Associates drafted this statement about their self identity:

The Adrian Dominican Associates of St. Louis align ourselves with the mission of the Congregation to seek truth, make peace, reverence life. We endeavor to express this commitment by the way we live our lives in our homes and communities. In the tradition, we promise to hold each other accountable as we strive to uphold the preaching charism of Saints Dominic and Catherine of Siena.

“Our life together brings us to prayer, to study, and to efforts to aid the overall mission of the Sisters,” Associate Carol Williams writes. “The bonds between us are laced together by the sharing of our life experiences and concerns.”

“We support each other in this commitment through the regular sharing of prayer, our preaching and our lives with one another,” Associate Dee Joyner writes. “We support the mission of the Adrian Dominican Sisters and value our association with them and their ministry.”

Associate Laura Law adds, “We acknowledge and celebrate the unique vocation of lay persons and seek to grow to our full potential as people of God…[in] a mutually beneficial relationship.”

As active lay women, the St. Louis Associates have taken on leadership roles in the Congregation. Dee Joyner chairs the Congregation’s Portfolio Advisory Board and Carol Johnson is one of the founding members of the newly formed Associate Life Advisory Board. For her part, Sister Joan is modeling a response to the call issued in one of the Congregation’s recently approved General Chapter Enactments: “journey with Associates as their identity evolves.”
Sister Cheryl Liske, OP, is a longtime community organizer and Executive Director of Gamaliel of Michigan. This is an excerpt from a play she wrote that was performed at the Convocation of the Dominican Sisters Conference in October 2015.

Guilhelma:
Laudare, Benedictere, Praedicare!

It’s hard to believe it’s been 800 years! More than that since the day when Brother Dominic and Bishop Diego walked into our little village.

Yes. A bishop and a priest walked into our village. Unarmed, with nothing but the Gospel of Matthew, they demanded nothing but our ears to listen to what they had to say. We had not encountered “princes” of the church like these two before.

Oh, sure, the Papal Legates had come with their retinues, wearing fancy clothes and riding fine horses, demanding the papal tithe and that we feed them from our meager stores. Bishop Diego and Brother Dominic wore simple robes. They walked into town, ate and slept in our guest houses, and admired our simple lives.

Oh, you don’t know who we are, do you? My Sisters and I are nearly invisible to you, hardly mentioned in your history books. What you know of us comes from the records of the Inquisition. And even those are sketchy still if, like us, they came from impoverished families. (I pray God remembers our names – and, of course, all of yours!)

Property records speak of us. Surely you know about the Archbishop’s deed of April 17, 1206? It granted a parish church and a former Benedictine priory “to the prioress and nuns, recently converted by the words and examples of Brother Dominic of Osma and his companions, living now and for all time at the [stronghold] of Fanjeaux and at the church of Saint Mary at Prouilhe in the diocese of Toulouse.”

By the grace of God, I am that “recently converted” Prioress. My name is Guilhelma. My companions are Ermengarde Godoline and her husband Giles and Lady Raimonde, one of my first and dearest sisters at Sainte-Marie de Prouilhe.

When Dominic arrived in our village, I was with the women of the bonshommes. My uncle had given me over to them when I was six. I received their black habit when I was barely 10. They were good, simple women who longed for an authentic religious life and who loved me and cared for me as I grew into adulthood. They taught me simple lessons from Scripture and how to pray. Oh, and Brother Dominic knew the Scriptures! My uncle heard him talking with our leaders in the village square; he was with Bishop Diego then. He preached with his words and simple life. The “Holy Preaching” had arrived in our village.

The Papal Legates also preached – on and on. They talked without listening, condemning us all and placing us under the interdict. I say this was … unholy preaching.

Continued next page
I hear that you refer to Brother Dominic as the “joyful friar.”

I cannot tell you how this “holy preaching” brightened our lives, filled our hearts, and gave us hope. We returned to the faith not by threat of punishment but because we came to know that God doesn’t hate this world and God doesn’t want us to hate it either.

God loves us. This is Holy Preaching.

Ermengarde:

Our world was shifting and shattering in those years. Giles and I were artisans in a neighboring village when the Albigensian Crusade – a slaughter – broke out in July of 1209. All to cover up the seizing of land and property. By the Pope’s own count, 20,000 people were slaughtered in Beziers – Catholics and Cathars alike.

Giles and I don’t know anything about politics and theologies. What we do know is that Dominic and the sisters and brothers gathered around the “Holy Preaching” seemed more godly than the Pope’s own men and the so-called Cathar “perfects.” So we asked to be released from bondage in our village and gave ourselves and all our goods over to Prouilhe as Oblates – Associates – of the Holy Preaching. We knelt at the altar, put our hands in Dominic’s hands and pledged allegiance to the Word of God – not to worldly kings or kings in priestly garb.

Lady Raimonde:

The slaughter went on. The unrest and shifting alliances played havoc with our lives. What was Dominic thinking about all this? No one really knows… Bishop Diego had died and Brother Dominic was appointed parish priest of Fanjeaux, living just up the hill from our Monastery in Prouilhe. He continued to gather followers for his Holy Preaching, and in 1216 he gained papal approval for his new Order of Preachers.

The women and oblates of our house rejoiced! Here was the
Gospel-poverty of our “heretical” past without the notion of an evil god and an evil world. Being Dominican meant embracing the world and the love of God. History would name our house at Prouilhe as the first foundation of this new endeavor, the first house of so many to be established throughout the world.

So you would think with such a great beginning and with such a saintly founder that everyone would live happily ever after, right? Well, the first sorrow came just five years later when Dominic died in 1221. Then, soon after that blow, we learned that our Dominican brothers wanted to get rid of us! They said we women were a burden to their great itinerancy. Your history books record these years of arguing about whether to “keep the nuns” as a crisis for the Order. A crisis for the Order? What about us? Were we not the first followers of the Holy Preaching? Were we not the cradle of the Order? We women of Prouilhe had even helped establish two other Dominican foundations by 1224 – St. Sixtus Convent in Rome and St. Agnes Convent in Bologna. What was to happen to us?

The crisis was deep in our house and in our hearts.

**Guilhelma:**
Of course, you all know how this ends. Twelve years later, in 1236, the Pope issued a bull, “subjecting the nuns of Prouilhe to the government of the Friars Preachers.” To move the Pope, to make this happen, there is a small phrase in your history books that reads, “The Sisters fought back.” That’s it. Nothing more. Just, “The Sisters fought back.”

The women of Prouilhe, the women of the Order, fought back to be part of the Order of Preachers – for all time. For us, being Dominican is born in the heart’s desire for an authentic religious experience. It is tempered by the experience of conversion to the “truth” that lies beyond ourselves. Being Dominican means falling in love with the joy of the Gospel and the communion of saints.

Being Dominican means being committed to the struggle for justice and standing up for the liberating truth of the Gospel.

**Standing up.**

Photo: **Barbara Chenicek, OP/Rita Schiltz, OP**

**Monastery of Sainte-Marie de Prouilhe, France.**

Play photos courtesy of **Dominican Sisters Conference**
Dominican Women through the Centuries
An Interview with Sister Suzanne Noffke, OP

As we celebrate the 800th anniversary of the Dominican Order, we are aware that there isn’t a single story line that can capture the richness of our history over the centuries. Looking at it through the lens of Dominican women, what broad observations might you make about the distinguishing features or landscape of Dominican life as it has been lived by Dominican men and Dominican women over the centuries?

The Four Pillars are “distinguishing features” – prayer, study, common life, service. I looked to see where those four were first named. I know they don’t go back very far, because they certainly weren’t part of our training. I would guess they came in the 90s, from one of the Chapters of the men. Well, these Four Pillars apparently stuck. They certainly do characterize Dominican life, but I don’t think they’re part of our longer history.

Apostolic life really does characterize common life for Dominicans. For us, common life is there for the sake of the apostolate, for the sake of the mission. When we were doing our Constitution, that was one of the things that Rome gave us flack on for awhile. They wanted an articulation of common life as the basis of religious life. We argued very strongly and we won in the end. For Dominicans, common life is there to support the mission, not vice versa. I think this is very distinctive for us as Dominicans.

Another factor is the “hierarchical relationships,” always with some degree of complementarity and mutuality. Even the fact that the branches of the Order were very early on referred to as “First,” “Second,” and “Third” establishes a hierarchy, puts the friars on the top and the nuns next, supportive of the friars, and then “Third Order” who became supportive of both groups. It does underline an assumption of the role of the women, even though Prouilhe was sometimes referred to as the “holy preaching” because of the support of the friars. A few people recently have taken that as an indication that the nuns were actually preaching, but I see no foundation for that. The nuns were preaching only in that broad sense that sometimes we even today talk about when we refer to every one of our ministries as a broad form of preaching. In terms of pulpit preaching, there’s no evidence at all that the nuns ever did that.
For some of the early nuns, that must have been a hardship, because those Cathars had preached, many of them. I would guess that there was a real sense of deprivation when Dominic formed them into a monastery and they could no longer preach as Roman Catholics. The Cathars were in many ways ahead of their time. The Cathars, of course, are the ones we traditionally refer to as heretics. Today we see them as real reformers, but in the age where orthodoxy was supreme, they weren’t looked at that way. They were simply the heretics and they were to be gotten rid of physically – killed.

**Until Dominic came along.**

Yes, although, while Dominic had an openness to debating, I don’t think we can really compare his stance with today’s ecumenical approach. He still was out to convert them.

**How have societal and ecclesiastical constraints on women shaped the way Dominican women have lived or expressed the preaching charism of the Order in our world? Do you see any ways in which these constraints on women might have opened new opportunities for Dominicans to express their preaching vocation?**

Earlier societal assumptions about women’s identity and role, for religious women in particular, were defined by the men appointed to direct them, and by the hierarchy. None of the women, or the men, would have questioned those assumptions any more than we today question what are truly assumptions. I think both of us can attest to our own formation, when things that we assumed were true were never questioned, and that today we would very much question because things along the way have hit us in the face and we’ve said, “Oh, my gosh!” That’s true in any age. We don’t recognize the things that we assume to be true as assumptions. They’re true, period.

In Dominic’s day, there were assumptions about women’s identity and roles, and women simply assumed that the men would define things. When we look back to our own histories as congregations, our foremothers thought nothing at all of having a friar write their Constitution or submitting their constitutions to the men for approval. It’s only our generation that has even begun to question that and say, “Hey, there’s something not quite right here!”

And so I think we have to recognize that in looking at our history – and part of that was the canonical provision that restricted preaching in any form to ordained males. To try to put a veneer on the medieval women as preaching in any formal sense is, I think, to misread history. They wouldn’t have thought of it. It would be something beyond the pale. And so, when Prouilhe was referred to as the “holy preaching,” it was because the men made their base there, not because of the nuns.

**Right – and because they supported their preaching through their prayer.**

That was their role – to support. Societal trends do influence our interpretation of the spirit within the Church. We push the envelope as far as we can and sometimes under the surface the views can shift so far, but that’s how things have always changed in the Church. Things that start out being **Continued next page**
unorthodox, some of them, at least, eventually make their way into acceptance and eventually they become part of the structure. But it’s a long process, and some things never make it.

As you think about the history of Dominican women over the centuries, what challenges would you name as critical to our identity today, especially for U.S. Dominican women?

One challenge is the complementarity of women and men. It’s clear that in the beginning there was a kind of complementarity of women and men – friars, nuns, and laity. Is it the same complementarity now or are we feeling a new complementarity today? Friars, nuns, Sisters, and laity are complementary in different ways. We are much more collaborative in partnering, much less hierarchical. For example, it’s much more common and accepted and taken for granted that sometimes a man will lead and sometimes a woman will lead. Sometimes an ordained male will lead and sometimes an ordained male will be the follower.

Today, the challenge of social responsibility has a lot to do with the evolution of our religious life from the monastic to the apostolic groups, to new kinds of groups that are forming today. Again, if we look back to our own training, our understanding of social responsibility was pretty narrow, even in terms of voting. It was a marginal part of our life, whereas now, for most congregations, it’s really an integral part of our life, and even in many of the monastic groups it’s becoming a more integral concern. And that, I think, is a very positive evolution.

Another challenge is making wise use of our Dominican tradition and our own congregational structures. There were some aspects of the Dominican tradition that today we’re tapping into, like the primacy of preaching and ministry over the structures of common life. That was Dominican. Other groups did not see it that way. The canonists in Rome did not see it that way. As I said, our Constitution Committee had to fight for that, but in the end, we did win and it was approved.

Another is the continuing call to study. Early on, the premise of study as the mark of Dominican life was predominantly theology and then, with the rise of the apostolic groups, other study became just as “sacred” to us, to the extent that I think all of us would buy into the statement that, if our ministries aren’t rooted in deep study, then there’s something definitely missing. As Dominicans, we should be assuming that we don’t delve into an issue without serious study of the issue. We aren’t simply “activists.” For us, it’s essential to do that study before we act. That really is a mark of us as Dominicans.

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Can you trace what it has meant, from an historical perspective, to be a woman preacher in the Order of Preachers? For example, what did the change from using the initials OSD (Order of St. Dominic) to OP signify for women in the early 20th century? And wasn’t Order of Penance used for a time by Dominican women?

When we were first founded, we were all OSDs, as you stated. When it was decreed from the friars that we would all be OP, our community stressed that that did not mean “Order of Preachers” for us, that it meant “Order of Penance,” which was, in fact, what it meant for the lay tertiaries. Theirs was the Order of Penance historically. And it’s only fairly recently that we as women have very explicitly claimed the OP to be Order of Preachers, and then beginning to preach in liturgical contexts – sometimes in “accidental” ways when somebody stepped up and preached because the priest didn’t show up or something like that. Now, in most Dominican Congregations, it’s very common for the Sisters to preach, at least on specific occasions.

This practice probably does go beyond Dominicans, but I think historically, because we’re the Order of Preachers, we put a different premium on it and a different kind of centrality. Now, at least in our group and I suspect
very strongly in your group, our Sisters’ preaching is very central to who we are and what we’re about, and that we see it as a very important part of our lives.

**What qualities do you feel that we Dominican women need to cultivate if we’re to respond to the needs of our times going forward?**

Openness to societal needs, but explicitly in a context of contemplative insight. Personally, this has been a big concern of mine, that as we opened up to social justice issues, for awhile we kind of lost our grip on the contemplative side of things. We’ve come a long way in recent years towards really integrating the contemplative side and the societal side. Unless our ministry, our preaching, or whatever you want to call it – our openness to society – unless it’s contemplative, it hasn’t quite measured up to what Dominic was all about. And unless our contemplation integrates all of those needs, it also isn’t up to what Dominic’s view of contemplation is all about – that there’s an integration there, an essential oneness. It’s not unique to us as Dominicans, but I think it’s very much something that characterized us historically and it was a real gift to the world, really. And the idea of having all of our ministry follow study, that we don’t just jump in, that we do study the issues before we act, and in the process of acting.

Another thing I believe in strongly is the power of community, that what I do has a power that’s way beyond me because – and to the extent that – it’s grounded in community, that the Congregation is behind me, that the Congregation is invested in me and vice versa. We put a lot of focus in the past years on the initiative of the individual, which is very important and has been a wonderful development, but maybe we’re only coming to putting that individual initiative very explicitly within community so that my ministry becomes – is – a community ministry and everybody else’s ministry is my concern. This is something that I think we can really tap and exploit, and beyond that, the broader collaboration with other Dominicans, other Catholics, other Christians, other groups, the world.

Collaboration, I think, is a more modern concept for us as Dominicans, even though it has roots way back to Dominic and the various “branches” of the Order…. But this goes beyond just collaborating with other Dominicans. It’s a broader spirit of collaboration. The more people we can bring in for genuine collaboration, the more power we’ll have for what we’re all about because in the end it’s not about us, it’s about the mission. It’s about accomplishing what Jesus Christ was all about, and anybody we can link up in that effort is what we’re about.

*...in the end it’s not about us, it’s about the mission. It’s about accomplishing what Jesus Christ was all about.*
How can one describe this life —
it's fullness, rightness, freedom, joy?

How describe the early yearnings,
the lover's soul,
on entering this life?

Surely the days and years
of contemplative soul,
of passionate desire for ministry,
of the joyous faith-filled women
with whom I share
values, commitment and community,
could never be written into words.

To be Dominican
is to immerse oneself
in the very real stream
of the world that surrounds us.

To search in prayer
and communal conversations
for ways to be Truth within it.

To know deep rightness in mission,
gratefulness for uncountable persons and places,
an ever greater oneness with the God
who is so manifestly emergent through all.
Reflection Questions

- As we celebrate the 800th anniversary of the Order of Preachers, what moments in the history of Dominicans are especially meaningful to you? Why?

- As several of the stories note, despite Dominic’s inclusion of women in the Order from the start, Dominican women have struggled to claim their rightful place. What might be the possible fruits of that struggle?

- What insights can we draw about the role of laity in the Order – beginning, as Sister Cheryl Liske points out in her play, with the oblates at Prouilhe through to today’s “Sojourners?”

- Sister Joan Delaplane observes that she would never have called herself a preacher when she entered the Order of Preachers, but has “come to understand that preaching is my identity.” How would you describe your identity as a Dominican? How has it evolved?

- What are your hopes for the future of the Order of Preachers – and the role that Dominican women, vowed and non-vowed, will play in its unfolding?
Congratulations and many blessings to the 2016 75-year, Double Diamond, Diamond, Golden, and Silver Jubilarians. Together they represent 5,430 years of dedicated service to the Adrian Dominican Mission.

May these Sisters know the heartfelt gratitude of the Congregation and of all the people whose lives they have touched.
Double Diamond Jubilarians

75-year Jubilarians
We Dominican Preachers of Adrian...

...impelled by the Gospel
and outraged by the injustices of our day
seek truth, make peace, reverence life.

Stirred by the Wisdom of God
and rooted in our contemplative prayer,
communal study and life in community,
we challenge heresies of local and global domination, exploitation,
and greed that privilege some, dehumanize others, and ravage Earth.

We confront our racist attitudes
and root out racist practices in our lives and systems.
We confront systems where women are denied freedom,
equality, and full personhood.

We walk in solidarity with people who are poor
and challenge structures that impoverish them.

We practice non-violent peacemaking.
We promote lay leadership and shared decision-making
for a renewed Church.

We live right relationships with Earth community.
We claim the communal authority and responsibility
of our Dominican heritage.

We commit ourselves to live this Vision
General Chapter 2004.

Affirmed in General Chapters of 2010 and 2016