



Why Dominican?

For the Formation Team: Before You Get Started

History of Formation

Why Dominican? began within the Southern Dominican Lay Province. Following the footsteps of St. Dominic, the Lay Provincial Council of the Southern Dominican Laity has always regarded formation as a crucial element in the preparation of members of the Order of Preachers. Since the Southern Dominican Province was formed in 1979 by friars from both the Eastern and the Central Provinces, initial formation of the Dominican Laity in the Southern Province also began as a mixture of the experiences of those in both Provinces. As the Dominican Laity took root in the South, The Rule of 1987 was followed and a list of suggested materials was published: a formation program for the laity was begun.

Attention to the Formation Program was one of the priorities listed by the Lay Provincial Council (LPC) at the meeting in 2002. Later in 2002, the Lay Provincial Executive Council (PEC) approved a list of approved topics that must be taught during the Inquiry stage of formation, a set of topics that must be taught during the Candidacy stage of formation, and two topics that should be taught before the completion of these two initial stages of formation.

In the next few years, particular emphasis was placed on standardizing lay formation procedures within the Province. Efforts included a yearly census of membership as well as a description of each group and chapter's formation program. A revision of the Particular Directory of the Southern Dominican Laity was completed and included a section on the formation of new groups. A formal Formation Survey was initiated in 2007. Each group and chapter was asked to match each of the approved topics from the 2002 listing with the specific materials used in teaching each topic.

The results of the survey were presented to the entire 2008 Lay Provincial Council in February of that year. The minutes of that meeting stated that "it was a mandate approved by the Lay Provincial Council of 2002 to teach the approved topics to Inquirers and Candidates, and not just a suggestion. It was agreed that not to take this aspect of Dominican Life seriously was an injustice to those who seek incorporation into the Dominican Family and that a solid Formation Program for Inquirers and Candidates must be provided in order to verify readiness for profession (now called promises). A continued program of study should also be provided for all those who are professed (now called promised)."

As a result, all eyes turned again toward Formation. A newly formed Formation Committee was initiated to tailor the formation program to meet the specific needs of the Southern Dominican Lay Province. The Provincial Executive Council met in June 2009 for an interim review of the status of the Lay Province. The Provincial Executive Council voted to implement the following changes to the Formation Program:

1. to adopt an existing formation program already used within our Province to use with new groups ,
2. to appoint a Promoter of Formation to coordinate new formation initiatives, and
3. to extend the Inquiry Program from 6 months to 12 months allowing for additional study and discernment.

The New Program: Why Dominican?

Adopting an existing formation program proved to be a complex project. The formation program used by the Lay Dominicans of the Holy Cross (LDHC) in Atlanta, Georgia was to be the basis for the new standardized formation program to be used throughout the Southern Dominican Lay Province. Any successful program, however, needs not only to have general compatibility for the many participants who will use it over the years, but also be geared toward their rather specific needs as well. In addition, although the formation program used by LDHC conformed to the Approved Topics of 2002, the program was not in a printed form that could be easily used by another group or chapter. In fact, with each new set of Inquirers, revisions were made and the sessions tailored to the specific people who attended. The project involved combining and balancing the need for an unchangeable program with the fluid nature of what being a Dominican means. Eventually, these efforts were put into a formal printed form and Why Dominican? came into existence.

Format

Why Dominican? is based on the four pillars of Dominican Life with a particular understanding of the active contemplative dimension of Lay Dominican life. It contains several sections including:

1. “For the Inquirer and Candidate: Before You Get Started” which contains general information and suggestions about working within a group.
2. “For the Formation Team: Before You Get Started” which addresses the history, rationale, and planning of the program as well as accountability issues.
3. several sections just for the Formation Team including:
 - a. a suggested format for an overview session of Lay Dominican Life called “Come and See” and suggestions for planning the event,
 - b. a study guide that is to be given to participants before each study session,
 - c. presentation notes that are to be used by the presenter(s) for each module/session. The presentation notes are in the form of a lesson plan. Included for each module/session are objectives, materials, prayer/contemplation of Scripture, Study steps, suggestions for Community and Apostolate, a conclusion, and follow-up plus an assignment.

- d. presentation handouts that may be used during or after a session.
4. A section for additional Resources to be used for more in-depth study.

The Inquiry Stage for the Southern Dominican Lay Province lasts for one year. Why Dominican? is, therefore, designed to last for 12 months and contains 10 main topics, leaving two months open for scheduling an extra session or a retreat or a social activity. The topics are:

1. St. Dominic and his Mission of Preaching
2. Praying the Liturgy of the Hours
3. The Vocation of the Laity in the Order of Preachers
4. Fundamental Constitution of the Order
5. Dominican Prayer
6. Dominican Study
7. Dominican Community
8. The Dominican Apostolate/Mission/Preaching
9. Basic Study of the Rule of Life
10. Basic Study of the Directory

Philosophy

The Inquiry Program is based on a schedule that begins in September with “Come and See”, an overall presentation of Lay Dominican life. Groups are encouraged to begin Inquiry classes in September, since many parishes have the beginnings of their time, talent, and treasure stewardship program in the Fall. It also allows for a Community Social in December. The Program can also be begun in January rather than September with appropriate modifications. It is suggested that a Discernment Retreat be planned either after the last topic or after the topic of Apostolate/Mission. If this latter choice is made, the last two topics can be included in a study portion of a retreat. Sufficient time for prayer /contemplation and meeting with individuals should be the emphasis of the retreat, however.

These materials not only contain the basic information to be taught, but also a section called Presentation Notes. The purpose of these notes is to provide essential support to those on the Formation Team who present the Inquiry and Candidacy Modules of the Formation Program to those interested in learning more about life within the Lay Dominican Fraternities (also known as the Dominican Laity). In addition to the essential information/facts about the Dominican Order, it is crucial that newcomers are exposed to the spirit of the Order. This must be done automatically as well as consciously. Sometimes this spirit is simply “caught” and sometimes it must be explicitly articulated to help a learner understand what is being presented. These Presentation Notes are intended to see that this essential dimension of being Dominican is emphasized in the teaching process and make it easier to do so!

As the mutual discernment of becoming a Dominican unfolds, usually newcomers formulate some version of two important questions in their mind. Each person must answer these questions definitively and honestly in his/her own heart before a commitment to the Order is made and received.

- Why become a Lay Dominican when I am already an active, practicing Catholic?

- Why become a Lay Dominican rather than a member of another laity group connected to different religious group or Order?

As those who are already Dominican know, the individual's answers to these questions come only after he/she has a thorough understanding of the four Pillars of Dominican Life. It is assumed that a newcomer already has a solid knowledge of the Catholic faith and strong desire to practice and preach it. (Recent converts are asked to wait for a period of at least two years before becoming Inquirers so they can actually practice what they have learned.) Whether or not the person is energized to practice and preach the Gospel within the framework of Dominican prayer, study, and community only becomes apparent as time goes on. The subtleties of such a life become known by personal introspection and participation in the formation sessions. This discernment must have sufficient time to unfold. Becoming a Dominican is a life-long commitment and it is not one that should be taken lightly.

The Formation Team, as guides in this task of discernment, must emphasize the many aspects of the Four Pillars and in some cases, their uniqueness to the Order. They must not only present the facts and history of the Order, but also the continuing spirit of our 800 plus year heritage lived through the Four Pillars. The Four Pillars is what makes the members of the Order defenders of the Faith at the same time that we remain vigilant and open to the signs of our times. The "how" we do these things is just as critical as demonstrating a passion to do them!

Newcomers are entitled to be presented with a view of Lay Dominican life that is substantive and authentic so they may understand and continue the heritage of our Father, St. Dominic, once they become Dominicans. Those who are already members of the Dominican Order are entitled to share and pass along this heritage with those who have been formed substantially as they have, according to Dominican tradition. This dual entitlement is not possible in a hit or miss project! Celebrating both the "veteran" and the "newcomer" and being able to join on equal footing with and within the branches of the Order are important reasons that the Order maintains its close connection to the Gospel message within Catholic and non-Catholic communities worldwide. Dominicans have an important responsibility to themselves and to others. Hopefully, these Presentation Notes will make such a responsibility a shared and easier one for all of us.

Dominican Dimensions

Each one of the lesson plans for the modules is based on solid educational practices used in the teaching of and learning by adults. In addition, each one is designed to foster Dominican life in a more subtle way. Two of the many of these deliberately designed procedures include:

1. Pre-reading of the information to be discussed so that all present may have time to reflect on the material before the meeting. This procedure also promotes a sense of equality among participants because each one will have an opportunity to enter into the discussion as a contributor.
2. Fostering discussions based on the basketball image of passing around a basketball (or idea) among several people with true interaction rather than a baseball image of a pitcher throwing a ball for just one batter to hit (a question and answer method) . Interaction not only invites all to be contributors, but also helps form community because each response links easily to someone else's.

It is strongly recommended that the methodology chosen for each module/topic/session be used as closely to how it is written as possible in order to gain the full benefit of these Dominican Dimensions. Leaving out a step or part of the lesson might lessen its effectiveness substantially, but such a possible effect might remain unknown to the presenter or the participant. Since Dominican Life assumes a life-long commitment to learning, however, new information relative to each topic is expected, anticipated, and welcomed. Supplementing the information in each module through additional reading or activities is thus strongly encouraged. A Resources section is included on the web site and will be periodically updated with additions. The methodology used is also a way for the scholars, artists, and teachers in the group to begin to take the initiative to share their gifts in the budding community. If you discover a particular way to enhance a topic and wish to share it with others, please use the Contact Us link on the Home Page to forward the information. Any inclusion of such material in a revision of Why Dominican? will be done with the permission of the submitter as well as properly identifying the source.

The Rule mandates that Candidacy lasts for minimum of a year. The format of Why Dominican? for Candidacy is basically the same as it is for Inquiry. In Candidacy, however, more initiative for study is expected of the participants. In addition, the topics are approached in a way that adds both depth and breadth to one's knowledge. The topics often become interwoven very closely. The result is that there is a natural grouping of topics that resemble a longer type of interdisciplinary unit of study rather than a separate subject by subject, start here and end there procedure. There will be notes along the way, however, to make this part of the study journey easy to follow. The topics for study during Candidacy (again, based on the "Approved Topics for Candidacy" from the Southern Dominican Lay Province) will include:

- History of the Order/ Symbols and Traditions of the Order
- Dominican Governance and Community
- The Dominican Approach to Sacred Scripture and Tradition
- Dominican Contemplation/ Personal Prayer/ the Rosary
- Liturgical Prayer/Liturgy of the Hours
- The Dominican Approach to the Mass
- Study and the passion for Preaching/ Lay Preaching
- Dominican Saints and Blesseds
- The Role of the Laity as modeled by St. Catherine of Siena
- Living the Rule
- Living with the Particular Directory

Accountability

Record keeping and accountability are not usual topics discussed openly in a formation program. They are necessary components, however, if the formation is to be a thorough one and one that provides a solid foundation for the rest of one's life. Inquirers deserve to know that they are entering an Order that has stability and authenticity rather than constant changeableness. Veteran Dominicans deserve to know that Inquirers will continue the Dominican heritage in a recognizable way. For these reasons, it is strongly recommended that in addition to the formal request and interview, that a set procedure for recordkeeping to insure that each Inquirer is instructed in each and every module be implemented before a person is able to proceed to Candidacy. The same is strongly suggested before a Candidate is allowed to make a temporary promise. This places accountability where it belongs: on the Inquirer or Candidate as well as on the Formation Team. This joint responsibility will contribute to perpetuating responsible Dominican governance of equals by equals.

On occasion, questions of isolation arise and involve arranging a unique form of accountability. In some cases, an individual may not live nearby an existing group or chapter. Although individual study is encouraged, one cannot become a regular member of the Dominican Laity in isolation, just by studying alone. The component of community is a critical one. The Rule prohibits isolated members. It is suggested, therefore, that such an individual gather other like-minded people who wish to pursue discerning a vocation within the Dominican Laity and contact the Provincial Executive Council of the Lay Province for instructions on how to proceed with studying as a group.

If a Promised Lay Dominican finds him or herself in a sudden circumstance of isolation, it is very important to consult the members of the local council or even the Provincial Executive Council for options. A vocation needs to be nourished consciously and consistently. All concerned must work together to find opportunities for that person to continue to study with the group in some way and to remain an integral part of the community. The accountability in these two situations remains a shared one.

One final note about accountability is necessary. As Dominicans, we are constantly seeking new knowledge. Fortunately, our quest for knowledge has been aided by the availability of many fine documents on the internet. Please note that many web sites contain copyrighted information protected by law. If you use any of these sites, it is expected that you use them in conformity with copyright law in the same way that you are expected to use copyrighted information available in printed form. While reading and using such information for personal use is allowed, often printing and/or distributing/sharing the material to others electronically or in printed form is prohibited unless the site grants a license that allows you to do so. It is each individual's personal responsibility to become knowledgeable about these matters of accountability and to act responsibly in abiding by the law.

Note: Please read "For the Inquirer and Candidate: Before You Get Started" for other important suggestions for group facilitation.