

General Introduction

to

The Dominican Laity Initial Formation Program

How does a chapter prepare those who aspire to become lay Dominicans? How do inquirers interested in the Dominican Laity discern whether God is calling them to this way of life? How can those who are already professed and now in re-formation update, renew, and gain other insights into the lay Dominican vocation?

The Lay Provincial Council of the Western Province established a Formation Commission to revise the Province's 1986 formation program. The fruit of this Commission is a set of competencies encompassing the basic knowledge and skills expected of well-prepared chapter members.

The content of the individual competencies is the focus of the learning experiences presented in each section. The competencies are grouped into four areas based on the four pillars of Dominican life: prayer, study, preaching and community.

PURPOSE

The purpose of this revised program of study is to provide inquirers with some theoretical insight into lay Dominican life and some practical experience which will prepare and enhance their ability to live the Dominican vocation.

This program is designed to help inquirers grow in love and spirituality, while enhancing their appreciation for their Catholic heritage and the charism of the Dominican Order. Anyone who pursues this program of study will benefit from the series of readings and activities presented here.

HOW TO USE THESE EXPERIENCES

In the pages that follow, each area of responsibility is treated as a separate and free standing learning unit. The design of each unit or area of responsibility is the same.

1. An explanation of expected outcomes lists the competencies for this section. This section is directed to the formation director or team.
2. The history and purpose section provides background information for the formation director/team which explains why these competencies are important.
3. Learning activities, including integral readings and interactions with more experienced Dominicans, are suggested. These are designed to help inquirers learn the competencies using a variety of teaching methods.
4. Outcome Activities are listed to provide inquirers with opportunities to demonstrate mastery of the specific competencies. They help both the inquirers and the formation director/team determine whether the objectives of the program have been achieved.

Inquirers, in consultation with the formation director, may select from the learning and outcome activities according to their individual needs and interests. As a result of study, reflection, and interaction with knowledgeable individuals, inquirers will be able to complete the outcome activities. The quality of response to these activities should give some indication of the level of expertise that inquirers are able to bring to the chapter.

5. A bibliography, organized by competency, which cites additional sources of relevant information is included to help inquirers extend personal knowledge and insights.

6. (May be deleted) Reprints of some selections listed in the integral readings section are included, when copyright permission and space allow. No permission is granted for duplication of these materials. Any attempt to do so is against the law.

INDIVIDUAL NEEDS

Because people's background, life experiences, and past professional and theological opportunities will differ widely, it is assumed that the formation director/team will recommend an appropriate configuration of preparation experiences shaped to the particular needs of the individual.

Since not every inquirer will need additional education in every competency, the activities are deliberately designed to contain some redundancy in presentation. Such overlap is intended to provide consistency and to present each competency as a discrete part of the larger area of responsibility. The intention of this format is to make it easier to pick and choose those activities that are best fit for an individual's needs, while maintaining the integrity or focus of each of the required competencies.

AN ACTIVE RECORD

This study program is designed to encourage the development of an active record or journal containing examples of learning and outcome activities indicating both the depth and breadth of individual experiences. The journal would contain a dated log section recording when activities are undertaken and completed; a readings and response section in which notes from the suggested readings and the inquirer's reactions are systematically organized; and an experience section in which one records ideas and insights gained through interacting with people or seeking out additional information in the course of completing the activities.

Such a journal should be a valuable resource: to give evidence of the inquirer's learning and understanding, and to aid the chapter in evaluating the inquirer's readiness for reception into the chapter.

DOMINICAN FORMATION MODEL

The Western Province provides this structured program with a formation director, and preferably a formation team. The formation director/team is appointed by the chapter to direct and monitor the learning activities and to review and evaluate the results of the outcome activities in the inquirers who participate in this program. The inquirers, in turn, will be expected to participate in activities assigned and to present evidence of mastery by completing the designated outcome activities.

A MENTOR

To foster optimism, growth and insight, the inquirer is encouraged to use the members of the formation team as mentors and/or fellow travelers on their journey of discernment, and to make every effort to interact with other Dominicans.

THE DISCERNMENT PROCESS

The moment a lay person expresses interest in the Dominican way of life, a process of discernment has begun:

Is this the way of life for me? Is God calling me to a Dominican vocation? How can I listen more intently to God's voice in my life? How can I be clear that this is where God is calling me?

Toward this end, chapters should ordinarily provide a minimum of two points of discernment. An initial contact, sometimes in person, sometimes over the phone, leads to a formal interview establishing the inquirer's interest in the Dominican vocation, their psychological and social fitness for community life, and their ability "to get something out of" the learning and outcome activities.

Some common misunderstandings about the lay Dominican vocation can be clarified during the initial contact, even before the first formal interview. For example, although we pray, we are not a prayer group. Although we study, we are not a study group. Although we are involved in apostolic activity, we are not an action group. Ultimately, inquirers are invited into a "way of life," a permanent commitment to live a life of prayer, study, preaching and community as envisioned by our founder, Saint Dominic.

Throughout the first year, the formation director and team are available to answer questions, to offer guidance, correction or encouragement, and to ensure that the inquirer is asking the right questions.

A final discernment comes at or toward the end of the first year of initial formation. This end-of-the-year interview is conducted by the formation team, and should help the inquirer to discern whether this is the way in which God is calling. Inquirers should give evidence of how their prayerful study and reflection on scripture has supported their initial development of the Dominican charism in their daily life.