

The Rule of the Lay Chapters of Saint Dominic

Introduction

The Historical Development of The Rule

The Dominican Laity originated in its present form with the promulgation of the first Rule under Munio de Zamora, Master of the Order in 1285. The spiritual origin of the Laity was in the penitential movements centered around Saint Dominic, who gathered around himself groups of the Laity for the spiritual and material defense of the Church and for apostolic work. The Laity has existed, under various names, as long as the Dominican Order itself and has always performed specific functions and collaborated closely with the other branches of the Dominican Family. There have been five Rules for the Dominican Laity since the foundation of the Order. The first was that promulgated by Munio de Zamora in 1285, for the Brothers and Sisters of Penance of Saint Dominic. The Rule of Munio, slightly amended, received papal approval in 1405. This Rule survived for centuries, serving the laity and being adopted for other branches of the Dominican Family.

The second Rule, adapted to the new Code of Canon Law in 1917, was approved in 1932 under Master Louis Theissing, with the title: Rule of the Secular Third Order of Saint Dominic. After Vatican II, the need was felt for a new Rule or an updating of the 1932 Rule; accordingly, the third Rule was approved in 1964. However, the General Chapter of River Forest in 1968 proposed a fourth Rule, which was promulgated by Master Aniceto Fernandez 1969 and approved on an experimental basis by the Sacred Congregation for Religious in 1972 under the title: Rule of the Lay Fraternities of Saint Dominic. With this title, reference to Third Order had disappeared, to be confirmed by legislation of the 1974 General Chapter at Madonna Dell 'Arco, abolishing such terms as First, Second and Third Order.

Finally, after the promulgation of the new Code of Canon Law and the Bologna Document on the Dominican Family, the General Chapter of Rome that same year, 1983, commissioned the Master of the Order to hold an International Congress of the Dominican Laity in order to renew and adapt its Rule. This, the fifth Rule, The Rule of the Lay Chapters of Saint Dominic, was approved by the Sacred Congregation for Religious and Secular Institutes in January 1987 and promulgated by Master Damien Byrne on January 28, 1987.

[Excerpted from The Dominican Laity Handbook, Province of the Assumption, Australia]

I. The Fundamental Constitution of the Dominican Laity

(Laity in the Church)

1. Among the Christian faithful, men and women living in the world by virtue of their Baptism and Confirmation, have been made partakers in the prophetic, priestly and royal mission of our Lord Jesus Christ. They are called to make the presence of Christ alive [Southern Province variation: to make Christ present] in the midst of the people so that the divine message of redemption may be heard and welcomed by all everywhere.

(Dominican Laity)

2. Some of these Christian faithful, moved by the Holy Spirit to live according to the spirit and charism of Saint Dominic, are incorporated into the Dominican Order through a special commitment according to their appropriate statutes.

(Dominican Family)

3. Gathered together in their communities, with the other groupings of the Order, they constitute one Dominican Family.

(Distinctive Character of Dominican Laity)

4. Within the Church they have a distinctive character in both their spirituality and service to God and neighbor. As members of the Order, they participate in its apostolic mission through prayer, study, and preaching according to the state of the laity.

(Apostolic Mission)

5. Supported by their mutual communion [Southern Province variation: fraternal union], in the example of Saint Dominic, Saint Catherine of Siena and our predecessors, who have enlightened the life of the Order and the Church, they witness their own Faith, attentive to the needs of people of their time and serving Truth.

6. Zealously attending to the particular goals of the contemporary Church, they strive in a special way to evidence authentic mercy toward all suffering, to defend freedom and to promote peace and justice.

7. Animated by the special charism of the Order, they are conscious that their apostolic activity has as its source an abundance of contemplation.

II. Life of the Chapters

(Life of the Chapters)

8. Let them strive, to the best of their ability, to live in authentic communion in accord with the spirit of the Beatitudes. This is done in all circumstances, performing works of mercy, sharing in good works with members of the Chapter, especially toward the poor and the sick, and praying for the dead. In this way they will be of one heart and one mind in the Lord

9. Collaborating with all their sisters and brothers [Latin original: cum fratribus et sororibus] in the Order, the laity should participate actively in the life of the Church, ready always to work with other apostolic groups.

10. To advance in their vocation, a union of action and contemplation, the Dominican Laity have as their principal sources:

a. listening to the Word of God and reading the Sacred Scriptures, especially the New Testament;

b. daily participation, if possible, in the celebration of the liturgy and the Eucharist;

c. frequent celebration of the Sacrament of Reconciliation;

d. celebration of the Liturgy of the Hours with all the Dominican Family and private prayer, such as meditation and the Rosary;

e. conversion of heart through spirit and practice of evangelical asceticism

[Southern Province variation: penance][Latin original: paenitentiae];

f. assiduous study of revealed truth and reflection on contemporary problems, in the light of Faith;

g. devotion to the Virgin Mary, according to the tradition of the Order, to our Father Saint Dominic and Saint Catherine of Siena;

h. periodic spiritual retreats.

(Formation)

11. The object of Dominican formation is to form adults in the Faith, capable of accepting, celebrating, and proclaiming the Word of God. Each Province is to establish a program of:

a. formation in stages for new members;

b. ongoing formation for all, even for members without direct access to a Chapter [Southern Province variation: even isolated members].

12. Every Dominican must be prepared to preach the Word of God. This preaching is the exercise of the prophetic mission of the baptized, strengthened by the Sacrament of Confirmation. In the present world, the preaching of the Word of God involves the defense of the dignity of human life, the family and the person. The promotion of Christian unity and dialogue with non-Christians and non-believers are part of the Dominican vocation. [NB: Both the Eastern and Central Provinces omit reference to non-Christians, which is in the original Latin text].

13. The [Latin text: praecipui, i.e. principal] sources of Dominican formation are:

- + the Word of God and theological reflection,
- + liturgical prayer,
- + the history and tradition of the Order,
- + contemporary documents of the Church and Order,
- + awareness of the signs of our times.

(Profession)

14. To be incorporated into the Order, members must make profession which consists of a formal promise by which they propose to live according to the spirit of Saint Dominic and according to the way of life prescribed by The Rule.

This profession is either temporary or perpetual. The following or a substantially similar formula is to be used for making profession:

To the honor of Almighty God, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, and of the Blessed Virgin Mary and of Saint Dominic, I (name), before you (name), the Moderator of this Chapter and (name) the religious promoter, representing the Master of the Order of Friars Preachers, promise to live according to The Rule of the Dominican Laity for (three years or my whole life).

III. On the Structure and Government of the Chapters

15. The Chapter is the appropriate means to nourish and develop each person in his or her own vocation. The schedule for meetings varies according to the different Chapters. The degree to which each member attends meetings is a sign of his or her own fidelity.

(Admission)

16. Observing the prescriptions of the Directory as to qualifications for persons and time of admission, the admission of candidates is committed to the responsible layperson. Once a decisive vote of the Council of the Chapter has been given, this layperson carries out the admission according to the rite determined in the Directory, with the religious promoter present.

(Profession)

17. After the period of probation determined by the Directory and with a favorable vote of the Council of the Chapter, the layperson responsible, together with the religious promoter, receives the profession, either temporary or perpetual [Southern and Eastern Provinces reverse these two] [Latin original: ad tempus vel perpetuam].

(Jurisdiction and Autonomy)

18. The Chapters of the Order are subject to the jurisdiction of the Order. They do, however, enjoy the autonomy proper to the Laity by [other Provinces use to] which they govern themselves.

(Jurisdiction in the Whole Order)

19. a. The Master of the Order as successor of Saint Dominic and head of the entire Dominican Family presides over all the Chapters in the world. It is his responsibility to preserve intact the spirit of the

Order and to establish practical norms according to the demands of the circumstances of time and place and to promote the spiritual good and apostolic zeal of the members.

b. The Promoter General represents the Master of the Order to all Chapters and transmits their proposals to the Master of the Order or to the General Chapter.

(Jurisdiction in the Province)

20. a. The Provincial presides over the Chapters in the territory of his Province and, with the consent of the Local Ordinary, establishes new Chapters.

b. A Provincial Promoter, brother or sister, represents the Provincial and is an ex officio member of the Provincial Council of the Dominican Laity. The Promoter is appointed by the Provincial Chapter or by the Provincial with his Council, after consultation with the Provincial Council of the Laity.

c. A Provincial Council of the Laity is to be established in the territory of the Province. Its members are elected by the Chapters, and it functions according to the norms of their Directory. This Council elects the Provincial Moderator [Latin text: Praesidem] of the Laity.

(Jurisdiction in Chapters)

21. a. A local Chapter is governed by a Moderator with a Council, who are fully responsible for its government and direction.

b. The Council is elected for a determined term and in the way established by the Directory. The Council elects a Moderator from among its members.

c. A religious brother or sister assists the members in doctrinal matters and the spiritual life. This religious promoter is appointed by the Provincial after consultation with the Provincial Promoter [Central Province variation: Representative] and the local Council of the Laity.

(National and International Councils)

22. a. Where there are several Provinces of the Order within the same country, a National Council may be established according to the norms formulated in the Particular Directories.

b. Likewise, if judged opportune, there may be an International Chapter. The Chapters of the whole Order are to be consulted on this matter.

23. Councils of Chapters may submit requests and petitions to the Provincial Chapter of the Friars; Provincial Councils and National Councils may submit them to a General Chapter. Members of the Laity Chapters should be invited to these Chapters to deal with matters that pertain to the Laity. [This paragraph is missing from the Central Province text, and thus the subsequent paragraph is numbered differently.]

(The Statutes of Chapters)

24. The statutes which govern the Dominican Laity are:

a. The Rule of the Dominican Laity (Fundamental Constitution, norms of life and government of the Chapters);

b. General Declarations of the Master of the Order and General Chapters;

c. Particular Directories.