

Feast of St. Dominic – August 11, 2011, St. Louis
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You have just looked into the eyes of the women, your Sisters, your Dominican Family, the family with whom you have chosen to share your life. You have blessed the ones into whose eyes you have looked -- with peace. Each pair of eyes into which you looked was a different color, shape and form, as each pair is unique. Compare these eyes to threads woven together to make a tapestry. Life is like that, made up of "threads," of experiences woven together and integrated into one whole - - as are the many threads that make up a tapestry. Some tapestries, like some lives, have nuances of color that just render the piece exceptional. Just as the addition of one little thread of appropriate color can change a tapestry from something very good to something exceptional, so the color added to our lives from our beloved colleagues have helped to transform us. All of you can call to mind that special person who has made all the difference in your life design. One glance into the eyes of another, with love can be as meaningful as that just right -- person who turns another's life into exceptional.

At the region meeting we listened to the words of Sr. Judith Schaefer, a member of our Dominican family, who challenged us as to how we are to live our one, wild, precious life. She reminded us that our life is to be about the Holy Mission -- that of Preacher. Sometimes it is best to ponder the words of our fellow Dominicans, and not only interpret them ourselves, but also listen to what others have to say about the word spoken in relationship to the God within us. When we compare this Word with what another says about it, our own interpretation of what we heard is either confirmed, or perhaps a new and different perspective is presented that we have not considered.

Judith Schaefer identified four characteristics of our Dominican Life:

As she outlined these characteristics, I thought about the four pillars of Dominican life as how they relate to her characteristics. Margie Palliser enlightened us to Don Goergen's further exploration what these pillars mean to us today, and then she expanded their meaning to the specifically Sparkill Dominican charism:

Judith's characteristics	Traditional	Don Goergen's	Margie's
Relationship	community	friendship	hospitality
Trust	mission	truth	excellence
Adaptability	study	freedom	zeal
Communion	prayer	integration	joy

Judith emphasized that at the heart of ministry is relationship. We need each other in our journey to God. Although we may live in different places and do different types of ministry, like the woven tapestry (who we are); our colors of threads (what we do) effect each other in ways we can never imagine. Together, we are the living Word which we could never be as separate individuals. What we do, how we act, our prayer, the living out our daily life, has an effect on the whole Congregation. Imagine the beautiful tapestry we as Sparkill Dominicans -- we as part of the Dominican family -- weave in our mission -- in our preaching -- whether from the church pulpit, or on the street corner. Our way of Preaching brings God's greeting to some person who would never have been touched by God's goodness, had we not been present at that specific time, in that special way to that particular person. It doesn't matter whether that person is five, fifty or a hundred. We impact that other's life. We influence community, we extend hospitality, and we offer friendship. You may never know the impact you have made upon another person at the time you have brought God to them. Once in Rome, I was introduced to a perfect stranger -- a foreigner -- but then in Rome, so also was I. This

was another Dominican from Malta, whom I had never met. She asked me where I was from. I told her that I was a Sparkill Dominican. Suddenly her eyes lit up, and she treated me as though I were a long lost friend. She had met a Sparkill Dominican years before, namely Sr. Loretta Butler, in Pakistan. Sr. Loretta had such a positive influence upon this person that immediately I was totally accepted as friend. At an earlier meeting we had years ago, we were asked to write a haiku. I have kept these in my files. I recall this one written by one of you that says it perfectly for Sr. Judith Shafer's characteristic of Relationship:
One of you wrote:

Friend, lover, helper
Welcome support, always there
Communion, Blessing

Sr. Judith's second characteristic, **trust**, leads us farther into the weaving of the tapestry. Trust is the confidence, faith, dependence and reliance upon another -- always. Sr. Judith stated that Dominic's "always trust" was sending out the brothers to preach at the very beginning of their Dominican way of life. He did not form them to fit a mold. He trusted them. Sr. Judith said that the monastic way of life was far different from that on the frontier. We, as 21st Century Dominican women, serve on the frontier. We are commissioned by one another -- with trust -- to preach -- in many varied ways. We promise one another support and mercy. The choices I make in my mission of preaching the Gospel hopefully are healthy, whole, and alive in spiritual relationship with others. Sr. Judith's words ring:
TRUST IS A MUST.

I relate the traditional pillar of study to Judith's relationship. We've all been educated in our field of expertise. What we didn't learn in a classroom, we learned from life's experience. Don Goegern's contemporary thought relates this pillar to truth. Truth is that elusive process that has varied meanings for different people. In the Gospel of John, Jesus said to the Jews, "*If you remain in my word, you will truly be my disciples and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.*" Truth sets us free in three ways:

- it frees us of sin
- it keeps us close to God.
- it leads us to eternal bliss

We hear Pilate ask Jesus, "*What is truth?*" Certainly Pilate's truth was very different from that of Jesus'. In Community we work toward a common truth. Here, truth becomes respectful -- I appreciate the other's truth. I wish to remain strong in my own truth, but might have to redefine my stance of truth if it needs to be adjusted to fit the Community's truth.

Margie has outlined this Pillar for the Sparkill Dominican as **excellence**. Excellence means doing one's best. My best may not be someone else's best. Someone else's best may far surpass mine, but to endeavor to reach for the best makes it the best and God is pleased. Paul tells us to run the race. We may not win, but what is important is to finish as best we can. Excellence brings value, distinction, virtue, and worth to the Mission of preaching. That one little appropriate extra thought, extra tweak is like the thread of just the right color that changes a tapestry into the exceptional and gives it excellence. This wonderful little haiku, again by one of you, bestows excellence to one's trust, one's truth, and one's excellence:

Ever present God
You walk the path before me

Trusting I follow

Sr. Judith's third characteristic of living as a Dominican is that of **Adaptability**. This is certainly a familiar characteristic of a Sparkill Dominican. How many of you were assigned a task for which you had no experience, no qualifications, no training, but were told to do the job? And.... you did it, wonderfully, with fervor, with zeal, and with amazing results even though your heart was in your throat because you were traversing unimaginable new territory? Maybe to your own astonishment and to everyone else's you did what you were asked to do, and did it with amazing greatness. You took that one little appropriate thread of right color and changed the tapestry of life from something very good into something exceptional. One of my favorite prayers comes from Therese of Liseux,

“Lord, I may never accomplish anything great,
but what I do, help me to do greatly.”

Adaptability is being flexible -- getting the job done -- learning new skills you never imagined yourself achieving. Adaptability relates to Pillar of Mission -- with our ultimate mission being -- preaching the Gospel in the Spirit of St. Dominic. Dominic did not burden the members of the Order with strict rules and regulations, but kept life dynamic -- with the ability of flowing easily in a different direction if and when the situation called for it -- to make the change that would work to the advantage of bringing the Good News to the situation. Doesn't adaptability help you flourish? Doesn't adaptability give you the spirit of Dominic, and Mother Catherine Antoninus Thorpe, and all those wonderful Sparkill Dominican women who walked before us and inspired us to be our best -- those women who were just the right color of thread to make our Sparkill Dominican tapestry excellent?

Goergen's concept for this Pillar of Mission is **freedom**. Freedom brings us to the spirit of what being a Sparkill Dominican -- of being a member of the Dominican Family -- is all about. Freedom requires us to listen to numerous and varied voices. If we treasure this freedom, we will listen to one another -- listen to voices -- that maybe in the past we may have not heard because of some personality predisposition. To listen to one another is to open ourselves in a contemplative way -- and hear not only what those with whom we agree have to say, but hear the wider perspective -- hear with trust in the other -- hear with fidelity.

Margie's specific charism for this pillar is **Zeal**. Zeal adds enthusiasm, passion, fervor, dedication, devotion, and eagerness to our adaptability. Imagine if every act we performed each day was accomplished with zeal. Wouldn't this world change because of how we do things -- because of how we carry out our mission?

This haiku created by one of you that relates to Adaptability, Freedom and Zeal says:

Dear God I love you
Bless my works for you today
You who are my strength.

Sr. Judith's fourth characteristic of Dominican life is that of **Communion**, that *“being of one heart and one mind in God.”* (Rule of St. Augustine). We ask ourselves, “Why am I a Sparkill Dominican?” Ultimately all of us would respond that our goal is to be with God -- sharing in eternal bliss. However, we have to get through this world first, and as Dominicans we do this in Community -- in Communion. In Communion with our Sisters we are with one another in how we respect and, as Sr. Judith said, **distinguish** one another. To distinguish is to individualize, describe, identify and differentiate that other person as Gift. We have all heard others speak of distinguished persons. When we speak of someone this way we mean they are fine, excellent, first-rate, top shelf, blue ribbon champions. Is that how we “distinguish” our Dominican Sisters? It's easy to accept what is the same about us. The aim of Communion is to create distinction -- accepting, not distancing

ourselves because of the differences among us. Sr. Judith said, "*We find life easier when everything is the same for everyone. Our struggle is to accept our differences.*"

The Traditional Pillar of Dominican life which relates to Communion is Prayer. I once asked one of my Dominican Contemplative friends -- because in a cloister you can't get away from the person who drives you nuts -- "*What do you do when you come across someone with whom you rub shoulders every day that just makes your life difficult?*" She said, "I pray a lot." We recognize when we are our BEST self, when we are our good self. The harder part is to have that compassion that allows for when we are not are best self.

Goergen's concept of this Pillar is Integration. Integration means completeness, perfection, absoluteness, wholeness, stability. These attributes come from prayer. Communion brings this completeness to our life.

Margie's specific Sparkill Charism for this Pillar is JOY. Isn't it fun when we get together and share pleasure, delight and enjoyment with each other? Doesn't joy radiate happiness? May we always meet each other with JOY! I go back to the first haiku and repeat it.

Friend, lover, helper
Welcome support, always there
Communion, Blessing

Each of us is a special thread, a unique color, woven together in the life we have chosen as Sparkill Dominicans. Our threads--each one important for the whole design, all together make a wonderful, unique and distinctive tapestry that brings joy to our environment. A summary haiku:

We come together
A tapestry is woven
Each thread so precious.