

FEDOSA CELEBRATES 50 YEARS OF COLLABORATION

Over seventy Dominican women and men gathered at the Mariannahill retreat centre near Durban over the last weekend in January to mark the golden jubilee of the Federation of Dominicans in Southern Africa (FEDOSA). Sisters from the Cabra, Newcastle King Williamstown Oakford and Missionary Sisters of the Sacred Heart the brethren, and representatives of lay Dominicans, Dominican associates and Dominican youth celebrated the past fifty years and laid out some plans for the coming years, stressing the importance of even more collaboration as together we face the challenges of preaching the gospel in our troubled world.

HISTORY OF FEDOSA

Fr Mark James presented a broad history of FEDOSA from its beginnings in 1974 in Johannesburg. The beginnings and the history, he said “must be understood in the light of Vatican II’s call for renewal and updating of religious life across the globe.” Today, he continued “the emphasis is on Family rather than on Federation.” The collaboration saw experiences of an inter-Dominican novitiate over some years, and in several different places. There were common ongoing formation courses, dubbed “*the Canoe*”, the establishment of a theological journal (*Grace and Truth*), commitment to Justice and Peace especially in the 1980s at the height of Apartheid in South Africa. YOPS was born, the Young Order of Preachers, holding annual conferences and producing a newsletter, *Veritas*. The Dominican Convention of 1998 aimed at greater unity and cooperation, and the Core Preaching Team involving a priest, a sister and a lay person in various retreats ran until about 2014. Dominican nuns had a brief presence in South Africa, first Spanish-speaking Dominicans and then a community from Kenya. There were a couple of FEDOSA communities, bringing together Sisters from different Congregations. In 2011 at the Dominican *Indaba* (Conference) Dominicans celebrated Dominican Life and wrestled with issues in the world. Later gatherings took shape in day workshops with guest speakers on key topics. Dominican Youth Movement took off in 2019.

“Today,” said the participants present in response to Fr Mark’s presentation “there are more countries involved and more variety. We are grateful for what has been, and are encouraged to carry on and challenged to do something new in preaching, in formation, in different forms of collaboration.”

DOMINICANS IN COLLABORATION. MOVING INTO A HOPE-FILLED FUTURE WITH GRATITUDE

Fr Isaac Mutelo used the image of *Sankofa*, a mythical bird, which looks backwards while moving forward, and carrying its egg. “We Dominicans,” he said, “are looking back at our history, and walking into the future.” Our hope began with Jane of Aza’s dream of faith and hope and setting the world on fire. Our sister, Catherine of Siena exhorted us “To be who God meant you to be and you will set the world on fire.”



In our own time, the late Pope Benedict recognized that Dominic reminds us that a missionary fire must always burn." It must be a constant incentive to make the first proclamation of the Gospel...". Dominic's secret was that for every hour he preached, he spent many hours in prayer.

Today, said Fr Isaac, "we celebrate with gratitude all the Dominican women and men before us in the region. We too are charism bearers... called to avoid pitfalls of anxiety, denial, panic in facing the future. The diversity within our family is like a rainbow.... Collaboration is nothing if it is not focused. Collaboration helps "foster a sense of unity, shared purpose and collective responsibility as together we live Dominican spirituality."

A DOMINICAN RESPONSE TO THE SYNOD

Sr Margaret Mayce, coordinator of Dominican Sisters International Conference, began her presentation by referring to the just-completed first part of the Synod on Synodality. She quoted Timothy Radcliffe: "We are called to walk on the synodal way in friendship. Otherwise, we shall get nowhere. Friendship, with God and each other, is rooted in the joy of being together." The purpose of the Synod is to plant dreams, draw forth prophecies and visions, bind up wounds, learn from one another and create bright resourcefulness. How, she asked, "does journeying together allow FEDOSA/the Church to proclaim the gospel? What steps is the Holy Spirit inviting FEDOSA to take to grow as an expression of the Synodal Church?"

Dominican Sisters International (DSI) was established in 1995 to enhance networking, collaboration, communication among apostolic religious. Today there are 17 854 Dominican Sisters in 145 Congregations, living in over 90 countries. DSI promotes the Sisters in their identity as preachers, facilitates communications and networking, fosters a more compassionate world, promotes collaborative initiatives.

Dominican Sisters Africa (DSA), a continental movement of Dominican sisters seeking to create links for the sake of Mission, has 661 Sisters, 6 generalates, 32 Congregations. Nonetheless it is a reality that there are fewer Sisters, increasing numbers of older sisters, fewer vocations, financial limitations. Our challenges are to remain in mission till we die, and to balance the needs of the mission with the care of the Sisters.

LAUDATO DEUM

Fr Neil Mitchell gave an overview and critique of Pope Francis' *Laudato Deum*, written as a follow up to *Laudato si'*. He pointed to some of the effects of climate change we are experiencing. In 2023 record high temperatures were noted globally; ice sheets are collapsing; the planet is polluted, and we are suffering from eco-anxiety. The Pope notes certain dismissive and unreasonable opinions. He critiques the technocratic paradigm, violence, indifference, denial, blame, and a throw away culture. There is so much we can learn from indigenous cultures. The decisions and the resolutions of the Conference of Parties (COP) have been poorly implemented. The Pope in turn has received criticism for leaving out animal agriculture as an issue to be addressed. Indeed, it was only in Dubai that animal agriculture made it to the COP agenda.

Stewardship is the traditional dominion paradigm of Genesis. A second paradigm is that of God's entrusting people with stewardship, and third paradigm is that of the interconnectedness of all living organisms. The Pope's documents move among all three. And yet, eco-theology may become the dominant theology of our time. "Are we," said Fr Neil, "taking the climate crisis seriously enough? Do we have an eco-spirituality?" We are called "to weep and grieve over what is happening to our world; we need to be moved to undergo conversion of heart." Eco-theology, he concluded, "is a move away from stewardship, allowing the earth to care for us. We are not in charge,"

COMMON PROJECTS

Participants worked in groups and identified a common project to which Dominicans can commit as part of our collaborative efforts

VISION STATEMENT

Participants reviewed and revised FEDOSA's Vision Statement

FEDOSA STRUCTURES

Participants were invited to review and make suggestions concerning FEDOSA's structures and Constitutions. As a follow up to this Leaders of the Religious Congregations have been asked to make the decisions concerning the necessary the structures, Public Benefit Organisation (PBO) status, the Constitutions, and annual subscriptions.

CLOSING

The gathering was closed with sincere thanks given to Sr Pelagia for her able facilitation of the process, and with appreciation for the joy of coming together as Dominicans to celebrate family. Participants committed to sharing gifts, working on climate awareness, being supportive of collaborative efforts, providing education and implementing programmes.

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