



# Dominican Sisters International Confederation

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My dear Sisters,

Do you know what happened in 1822? The Society for the Propagation of the Faith was established in Lyon, France. Brazil declared its independence from Portugal. The United States formally recognized Mexico as an independent nation. Charles Graham received a patent for false teeth! Both Ulysses S. Grant and Rutherford B. Hayes were born in Ohio! Clement Moore wrote “The Night Before Christmas.” Araminta Ross, better known as Harriet Tubman, was born a slave, later to become instrumental in the liberation of slaves through the Underground Railroad. And, the first group of freed American slaves settled a black colony known as the Republic of Liberia. Yes....1822 was quite a momentous year! But by far, the most significant event of all, was the gutsy decision of nine young women from Kentucky and Maryland, to respond to the invitation of Fr. Samuel Wilson, OP to become part of the fledgling Dominican venture in the United States. It seems that Fr. Wilson had tried, unsuccessfully, to recruit women from Europe for this adventure. However, it would be the women with pioneer blood flowing through their veins who proved the best for the task at hand! And our gratitude for them knows no bounds!

Just look at the legacy they have left behind! A veritable kaleidoscope of warm and wonderful women of the Word; women of varying shades and hues; lovers of Truth; multi-talented; multi-lingual; preachers of grace; teachers; counselors; doctors and nurses; farmers; bakers; potters and poets; scientists; researchers; theologians and peacemakers; and, at the end of the day, all, every last one down through these 200 years, outrageous lovers of God’s good people, and God’s good Earth!

So, dear Sisters, what a privilege it is for me to share with you a few words of congratulations, gratitude and support, as you recognize the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the presence of Dominican Women in the United States! You have all come quite a long way since that first group of pioneer women gathered near Cartwright Creek as the Congregation of St. Catharine of Siena, Kentucky. And though circumstances have changed over these 200 years, your love of God and your commitment to Dominican life and mission do, indeed, endure. You know only too well that forms may come and go; but intention, the matters of the heart, remain and deepen over the years.

I have no doubt that Mother Angela Sansbury is bursting with pride at what she now beholds! From your very humble beginnings, nothing held you back. Not the hardships of life in a crowded log cabin; not a devastating fire; not the call to move beyond where you felt at home, to birth new Congregations. You leaned into grace every step along the way, and great things happened for God’s people. And now, 200 years later, no more is asked of you, than what was asked of your foremothers; simply, that you continue to *lean into God’s grace*.

Of course these times of ours present their own unique challenges. We live in a time of war and we continue to struggle with the lingering affects of a pandemic. Polarization in both our Church and in society has reached an unprecedented level, with civility replaced by a disdain for truth and hostility towards the other. And even our own religious life may seem to lack a clarity and certainty that we had become accustomed to. Where is it all going now? How do you even begin to negotiate the next 200 years?!

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Our sister, Suzanne Noffke, may have some words of wisdom to set you on a steady course. She reminds us that Dominic's new Order was considered "*revolutionary, because it abandoned centuries-old patterns that would not serve the new need...and generations of Dominicans who have gone before us have brought us to a mindset that is free to question and to even change and let go of what they have bequeathed to us.*"

She continues: "*All of these heroes of ours looked constantly ahead, never clinging to the status quo. Our very inheritance, then, tells us that letting go is an essential part of journeying forward to the goal; that it is the goal that matters, not the shape of the road.*" (1)

Forms may come and go; but intention, the matters of the heart, remain. *It is the goal that matters; not the shape of the road!* So give yourselves over to the matters of the heart that your Dominican foremothers set their sights on 200 years ago. Never tire of the pursuit of truth, of preaching the Gospel, of witnessing to a love which is inclusive beyond measure! It is precisely for this, dear Sisters, that you have been called; and a weary world eagerly awaits your response! And when you may feel that the road is tedious, or filled with obstacles beyond your capacity to cope, remember to simply *lean into grace; because grace will always meet you where you are, and not leave you where it finds you.* (2) And with God's good grace as your companion, imagine what surprises await you as you embark on the next 200 years!

Please know that I join my prayers with yours in great thanksgiving for this wonderful occasion! May the Spirit of Peace be with you all!

With deep affection, your sister,

*Margaret*

*Margaret Mayce, OP*

1. *Looking At a Dominican Future Through Catherine's Eyes*, Suzanne Noffke, OP, Northeast Dominican Six, November 17, 2007
2. Annie Lamott