

DAY 4 May 15, 2019

Dominican Sisters International (DSI) Ninth General Assembly, 12-17 May, 2019

DSI DAY 4: Quilting Threads of Encounter: Teresa Maya, CCVI

Anne Lythgoe, OP

ROME- May 15, 2019. The focus of the 2019 DSI Assembly shifted on Day 4 when the group heard from the keynote speaker, Sr. Teresa Maya, CCVI, past-president of the Leadership Conference of Women Religious (LCWR). Within the context of its theme: *Quilting Threads of Encounter*, Teresa recalled encounters with Dominicans in her life that made an immediate connection with her listeners. This was especially true, since Teresa spoke to the group in Spanish.

In talking about the tradition of quilting, she noted that the word is ***acolchando***. Teresa shared a photo of Sr. Margaret, CCVI, working on a quilt. Another sister started this patchwork 15 years ago, so Margaret was asked to help her finish it. In this tradition, small pieces of fabric that are no longer needed, become a part of something new. Religious life is like this. Sometimes it is necessary to adjust in order to have something new.

Quilts are complicated works of art that take a long time. The call to quilt is a call to make a new work of art. Its better when this is done together as a group. Tradition in US is that women get together to make a quilt. Almost all the US congregations do this at one time or another. It is an activity of encounter. All are going to put a stitch on it. It has to belong to all. I hope that DSI is going to be a quilting, an encounter together. You are making a quilt, each brings a little bit of cloth.

Part 1 Encounter/Encuentro as bridge building.

In looking at any geographic map, historic or contemporary, they tell us what separates us. There are other maps of culture, race, ideology, wealth and poverty. Maps let us know where the borders are and borders are being crossed all the time. Quilting threads of encounter call for new maps and therefore we need to build bridges. Bridges take a long time to build and must be built from both sides so that dialogue can take place in the middle. So we must engineer in flexibility. Building bridges means there has to be a collaboration that creates community, humanizes, and transforms. I cannot build just from one side. The process of encounter must always have two sides. If one dominates the other, there cannot be true unity.

Teresa noted that Pope Francis, in *Gaudete et Exsultate* (6) said that no one is saved alone as an isolated individual. Today, no congregation or institute can be saved alone, on its own. The call to encounter is inter-congregational, intercontinental, intercultural.

Crossing bridges with your sisters is also a call. Cross the bridge without reservation. Crossing the bridge, the last steps are yours alone. Some need to jump, some are afraid and need to be pulled. Leadership brings all across the bridge. Leadership must be willing to take the last steps.

Her question for small group conversation: The future of humanity demands new explorers and new architects that encounter and build bridges. How are we contributing to this new architecture?

Part 2 Resisting “Tribalism”

Teresa explored why understanding encounter and building bridges is so important today. She described her early experience of coming to the US from Mexico and having to learn English. She said, “Everyone had to be like an American, resemble Americans. But this model no longer applies.” Everyone tries to maintain their identity, staying true to the familial DNA, celebrating the distinguishing features of their origins, ideologically, racially, ethnically, and politically. This creates greater segregation and breakdown human connectedness – a breakdown of social fabric. She noted that as much as technology has connected us, it has also segregated us into tribes: what to wear, who to text, how we consume information. There is a new kind of global tribalism that only serves to separate us.

There is a continuum of models of relationship: from exclusion, to segregation, to “melting pot” or multiculturalism. But the most transformational model is to be intercultural. (citing Anthony Gittins).

Teresa share a video of the poem “Home” by Warsan Shire ([view here](#)) She asked, “What is the Dominican answer to this?”

Her question for small group conversation: Our world is reconfiguring... new lines, tribes, understandings are being drawn. Who are the new explorers who will venture into a new world?

Part 3. An Encuentro Tradition (A Pan-American Legacy)

Now to look at the tradition of encuentro in Latin America, acknowledging that there is so much diversity all over the world-- Africa, Asia. Teresa asked the group think about their own tradition of encounter as she described her own. Encounter might mean a football match, a school reunion, living together, even a conflict. Encounter has a different meaning than what we understand in the US.

She noted the importance of Pope Francis’s role as a Cardinal at the 2007 assembly of the Conference of Latin American Bishops (CELAM) in Aparecido, Peru. He was a key figure in the publication of its final document. This has shaped his papacy and the way the Latin American church understands itself.

Her question for small group conversation: What can we contribute to the culture of encounter from the perspective of DSI?

Part 4 Competencies for Encounter and Bridge Building

Teresa noted that the skills needed to engage a culture of encounter include intentionality, competency and commitment. We must be changed by our encounters with one another. Our encounters need to be more than just a beautiful experience. We must have the sense of purpose, the skills and commitment to engage each other. She said, “You are the mirror of the congregation, if you cultivate curiosity, a willingness to be open to possibilities, suspend judgement, look for the truth.

Finally, Teresa invited the group to consider ***contemplative dialogue*** as a pathway to understand a Dominican way of encounter. Taking from the work of LCWR in the last number of years, she described a particular way of conversation that helps us go deeper with each other.

She invited the group to spend some time in language groups with each other as the last task of the morning. The method of contemplative dialogue includes: sharing what matters. Use an economy of words (hard to do!). Allow the ideas of others to emerge. Allow moments of silence. Offer hospitality to explore differences. Welcome difference.

Pope Francis said “whenever we encounter another person in love, we learn something new about God.” (EG 272)

Her question for small group conversation: What is the Dominican Encuentro style? How can leadership contribute to fostering a culture of Encounter?

The group enjoyed an afternoon visiting Bracciano, a small town where the Dominican Sisters of St. Cecilia have a convent, and they enjoyed their hospitality.

Dominican Sisters International is an International Movement of Dominican Sisters of Apostolic Life founded in Rome in May 1995 primarily to unite Congregations of Dominican Sisters of Apostolic Life worldwide in their preaching mission. For more information visit the website: www.dsiop.org.