

[May 13 DAY 2]

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

## **DSI DAY 2: DOMINICAN SISTERS AROUND THE WORLD WEAVE THREADS OF COLLABORATION**

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*Anne Lythgoe, OP*

ROME- May 13, 2019 – The days of the DSI Assembly promise to be very full ones, and Monday, the first full day kept that promise. After beginning with morning prayer in language groups, the first session included an update and report on DSI activity from **Sr. Marie Therese Clement, OP International Coordinator**. There were also reports from the Continental Coordinators and the UN NGO Representative in New York.

### **International Coordinator**

Sr. Marie Therese described the work of DSI over the last three years, including strategic partnerships and relationships, the realization of mission, governance and operational efficiency. DSI spans most of the planet and she noted that there are 20,862 sisters in 110 countries, and 147 member congregations.

She spoke of our shared vision, determination, and common desire to make the journey together. “It is a journey of faith, a prophetic communion that invites us to go together in order to go far in preaching.” Quoting an African proverb: “If you want to go quickly, go alone. If you want to go far, go together.”

Continental Coordinators have been creative in making connections in their respective continents. They have worked hard to get member Congregations to engage, despite the difficulties they face with the limits of their resources.

Marie Therese described DSI as being in a kind of foundation period, where we negotiate change in life circumstances in which the Gospel needs to be preached. Our context: human migration, human trafficking, violence, mass media and technology. Greater communion is needed to pursue our preaching mission. Communion across Congregations around the world that is prophetic was the founding idea of DSI.

### **Africa**

The **Coordinator for Africa, Sr. Faustina Jimoh, O,P** offered her report noting some of the major events that have taken place in Dominican Sisters Africa (DSA) over the last three years. She described her work of visiting sisters at the grassroots level to generate participation and build relationships among sisters in Africa.

Formation and Communications workshops have taken place to support the goal to “*support one another in living out the Dominican Charism and to claim and promote our identity as women preachers.*” The Continental Assembly gathered 29 delegates in 2017 focusing its reflection around

inspiration from Christine Mwali, OP, “keeping the homestead fire alive.” Faustina described a variety of events in each of the four zones that build relationships with one another and encourage sisters in their mission. Other collaborations take place namely: participation in the UN Commission on the Status of Women, the Inter Africa Order of Preachers (IAOP), Dominican Youth Movement among others.

Sr. Faustina also enumerated some of the challenges of DSA, including the desire to hold annual assemblies in zones, development of language programmes, and other important hopes that are hampered by limited financial resources.

She also expressed her gratitude for having the privilege of serving as Coordinator and was happy to welcome Sr. Venentia Velephi Muthembu, OP as the new Coordinator for Africa.

### **North America**

The **Coordinator for North America, Sr. Gene Poore, OP** said, in her report. “DSI is a wonderful way for Dominicans in North America to connect and intertwine their lives with our Dominican family throughout the world. The mutual relationships made through DSI have strengthened our understanding that Dominicans have family everywhere.” She mentioned that in November 2018 a new delegation traveled to Iraq as a sign of our solidarity with our Dominican family there.

Dominicans in the United States face difficult challenges to creating spaces of encounter, renewal and hope in the present political and cultural climate. The sexual abuse crises, gun violence, racism, and nationalism polarize families and civic communities. “We see anti-immigrant policies as a new expression of racism. We are responding at the southern border by sending members to help those who seek to find a new home with us,” Gene said,

“Political leaders seem unwilling or incapable of working together to address urgent social realities. There is a darkness in our homeland that is painful and deeply sad. All the more reason for us to weave threads of hope. “

Our collaborations have been at the heart of advocacy for climate justice, human trafficking and justice for the poor. Speaking truth to power calls us to courage and truth seeking. There is a new energy to engage our younger members in the transmission of the treasure of Dominican Charism through intentional conversations about the quality of vowed life for the future. We are collaborating on a new Dominican Charism Initiative with our sisters in Africa. The challenges are, indeed, soul size. In this time of uncertainty, in this liminal space, we hold a profound belief in God’s Spirit leading us into a future full of hope.

### **Latin America and the Caribbean**

Continental Coordinator, **Sr. Noemi Zambrano** made a report on the realities **of Latin America and the Caribbean**. She noted one of the goals of CODALC is to “*promote Dominican religious life based on an*

*understanding of history in light of the Word of God, building communion amongst all congregations in view of achieving a better evangelization of Latin America and the Caribbean.”*

Noemi said “If history is written by the winners, then there is another story.” CODALC mirrors the same structure as DSI structure with zone coordinators, who periodically meet as a team. Most recently, we have set a high priority on women and girls in situations of vulnerability. This focus unfolds at every level: in justice peace and care of creation, in theological reflection, preaching, the arts, animation services and much more.

CODALC has a common focus on strengthening their commitment to vulnerable women and girls; promoting Laudato Si; and tightening inter-congregational ties. They are especially interested in promoting the experience of our younger sisters, and to collect and cherish the memory of the Sisters who walked before them-- founders and revolutionary women of Vatican II, everyday saints, who created unity.

Noemi wove together threads that comprise the challenges of her region, which are rooted in the vast geography of Latin America, finding ways to distribute emergency aid in the aftermath of climate phenomena and overcoming problems with access. The most obvious example has been in the devastating social and economic collapse of Venezuela, a situation that was graphically described in a later **Spotlight Report** from Sr. Emerita Avila Urribarri, OP from the Dominican Sisters of St. Rose of Lima.

## **NGO UN Report**

**Margaret Mayce, OP, our NGO representative at the United Nations**, described the nature of DSI presence in New York and the focus of her work.

Margaret lifted up the 17 [Sustainable Development Goals](#) (SDGs) as the main focus for advocacy. Emphasizing that all goals are about everyone, she said, “They are for all, not just the few. UN is committed to leaving no one behind and reaching the furthest behind, first”.

If left to themselves governments may not work to meet these goals, so organizations in civil society, non-government organizations, like DSI, need to influence and advocate on behalf of these goals. She pointed to the Justice Coalition of Religious, funded by the Conrad Hilton Foundation, which includes 19 religious congregations at the UN in New York. The prophetic call of our charisms to bring about the common good, action on behalf of justice and transformation for the world, is at the heart of preaching the Gospel. DSI advocacy in NY is effective when it is in concert with advocacy at the base.

Margaret noted that we cannot address SDGs without working on behalf of migrants. This is a global problem that requires a global solution.

The *Global Compact for Safe and Orderly Migration* was adopted last year, with 152 of 192 of member states signing on. It calls for the protection of human right of all refugees regardless of status; protection against sexual violence; work to end the practice of detention of children in the attempt to identify status; and condemns xenophobia. But not everyone signed it, perhaps because of a legitimate feeling of being overwhelmed by the problem. Resurgence of nationalism and xenophobia in the USA, Poland,

Israel, Hungary and the Czech Republic, who did not sign it, reflects the complexity of the issue.

The DSI Solidarity Fund has brought women from DSI's five continental areas to NYC to attend the Commission on the Status of Women. Since 2013, 45 sisters from 20 countries have experienced solidarity with each other and women worldwide through this program that opens a window on global policy.

The UN is a critical venue in which DSI can speak truth to power, bear witness to Gospel values in a world torn apart by conflict and greed. DSI participates in the influence of policy, SDGs, advancement of women and girls, poverty eradication-- all this makes for peace.

Margaret's inspiration comes from our sister, St. Catherine of Siena, "Cry out as if you had a million voices, it is silence that kills the world".

The very full day ended with Eucharist and supper. Optional concurrent conversations on Iraq, Lay Associates, Archives, and Dominican Schools were offered in the evening.

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**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](http://www.dsiop.org).

