MISSION STATEMENT

We, the Houston Dominican Sisters, publicly commit ourselves to study and address the crucial justice issues of our times.
We assume the risks inherent in preaching and teaching the gospel.
We will work to transform social structures which oppress the powerless, ministering with them in our common struggle to remain faithful to the Word of God. 1991

DIRECTIONAL STATEMENT

We, the Houston Dominican Sisters, commit ourselves to a deepening of personal and communal spiritual life which grounds us and moves us to action.
We will develop a consciousness of local and global environmental issues; we will live and act in an ecologically responsible manner.
We will advocate the transformation of those social conditions which oppress women and children.
We will sensitize ourselves to racial discrimination and commit ourselves to work for equality for all persons, especially those caught in systemic discrimination. 1992

CORPORATE COMMITMENT

We, the Houston Dominicans, moved to a strong reaffirmation of our Mission and Directional Statements, pledge ourselves to renewed accountability for the commitments they embody. With one voice we claim our Dominican tradition as “Communities of the Holy Preaching,” and embrace our call to be women preachers of justice. 1997

LEADERSHIP

Marygrace Peters, O.P.  Priorress
Adrian Dover, O.P.  Vicarress
Pat Casey, O.P.  Councilor
Antoinette Carter, O.P.  Councilor

The Good News is published twice a year by the Dominican Sisters of Houston, Texas 6501 Almeda Rd.
Houston, TX 77021-2095
713-747-3310 Fax: 713-747-4707
E-mail: houstonop@domhou.org

We welcome correspondence at the above address.

Printed on Recycled Paper

FROM THE PRIORRESS

Workers for the harvest

As our garden grows, so too the prolific produce of our lives and mission! This Good News edition highlights but a few of the ministries that are so integral to the deep, yet ever-new story of the Houston Dominican Sisters.

I am always edified by the myriad ways that we have responded to the "signs of the times," a phrase made popular by Pope John XXIII over 40 years ago. He was urging the church and its religious communities toward renewal and reform in the light of the present age. In a similar vein, Pope Benedict XVI’s recent encyclical, his first, Deus Caritas Est (God is Love), underscores the important connection between the love of God and the works of justice. He declares that the church “cannot and must not remain on the sidelines in the fight for justice”(#28). Drawing on an ancient theme in the practice of the early church Benedict puts charitable service on the same theological plane as celebrating the liturgy and preaching the word of God.

Perusing this issue of the Good News provides us with ample confirmation that our mission continues to be informed by the universal church and the charism of Sts. Dominic de Guzman and Catherine of Siena.

Recently I was present when the Jesuit Volunteer Corps South gave the Standard of Christ Award to Sister Helen Prejean, CSJ, for her outstanding ministerial commitment in opposition to the death penalty. In her acceptance speech she quoted the fourth-century Saint Basil the Great who said: “Annunciations are many but incarnations are few.” This Good News underscores some ways in which Houston Dominicans attempt to incarnate the gospel of Jesus, in Guatemala, Kenya, Houston, or wherever we are sent. And what is clear is that we are doing what we are called to do in collaboration and partnership with others whose values we share and without whom the mission would be incomplete. That includes the readers of this letter who support, sustain, and actively participate in the sacred preaching that inspires our daily efforts. We are at once grateful, humbled and proud.

The seven-year-old grandniece of one of our sisters probably said it best the other day when I was on my electric scooter (relieves the arthritic knees) showing her and her five-year-old sister around the grounds. One was perched on each knee. The seven-year-old asked if I owned the scooter. I responded that yes I did since it was our common property. “You are sure lucky to work here,” she said. I could not agree more! Grace abounds.

Marygrace Peters, O.P.
The Dominican Sisters’ Ecology Committee had a dream in the fall of 1994 – the dream of using a small plot of the motherhouse grounds for a vegetable garden. This was to be a very special garden, one that would give visible witness to our commitment to live and act in an ecologically responsible manner. The dream came alive, and our garden goals are two-fold: donation of organic garden produce to help those in need, and education to assist others with the practice of organic gardening in their local areas.

The garden has five beds, each 3 feet wide and 27 feet long. A smaller sixth bed is reserved for several fruit trees, herbs and flowers, and a beautiful bird-bath crafted by artist-gardener, Isabelle Chapman. During the first ten years, garden volunteers, volunteer groups, student visitors and service groups were instructed — and inspired — by Sr. Clement Johnson, botanist and resident expert. Since Sr. Clement’s death, our wonderful volunteers remain faithful! Each Tuesday, the gardeners are nourished by friendship and sharing, by garden tending and planting.

From the outset, the Dominican Sisters’ garden has been affiliated with Urban Harvest. We were on the first Urban Harvest Garden Tour in 1996, and will again host an Urban Harvest gathering on April 22. Produce from the garden averages 1,000 pounds each year. Our garden continues to be financed by donations, and we are deeply grateful to the garden donors!

In April of 2005, the Dominican Sisters’ Community Garden reached its 10th anniversary. The garden is now a place of tranquil beauty with seasonal plants and flowers, seating and wind chimes. It continues to offer support for neighbors in need. Produce is taken weekly to Manna House, a cooperative Third Ward ministry of seven religious congregations near the Dominican motherhouse.

Donations of clothing are also needed and welcomed by Manna House.

We have had many adventures: no irrigation at the outset, and an occasional hard winter freeze. Only strategic watchfulness has protected plentiful tomato crops from the birds and our tender produce from the rabbits. We have little victory to report over the squirrels. However, rabbit munching was halted a year ago with the installation of a rabbit-proof fence. The fence installation is a major adventure story! Subsequent addition of tree mulch further enhanced the beauty of our garden space and has made it a pleasant work area rain or shine!

Visitors and volunteers are welcome. For a visit or a tour, contact us at 713-747-3310. Sr. Heloise or one of the gardeners will gladly respond.

Volunteer gardener Debbie Leflar provided many beautiful photos from the garden that had been part of a calendar she designed as a gift for the other gardeners. All photos on the cover were taken by Debbie except for the group picture by Kara Masharani. Pictured in the group photo, from left, are Becca Byrne, Debbie Leflar, Garland Kerr, Joan Mateker and Sr. Heloise Cruzat.

**On the Cover**

Volunteer gardener Debbie Leflar provided many beautiful photos from the garden that had been part of a calendar she designed as a gift for the other gardeners. All photos on the cover were taken by Debbie except for the group picture by Kara Masharani. Pictured in the group photo, from left, are Becca Byrne, Debbie Leflar, Garland Kerr, Joan Mateker and Sr. Heloise Cruzat.
The Dominican Sisters of Houston honored Archbishop Joseph Fiorenza and Dr. Guy Clifton at their 2005 Advent Brunch. Though the archbishop was unable to attend the ceremony, both men were presented with the Sister Pauline Gannon Recognition. The honor is named for an early prioress of the community who left her mark through her inspiring leadership. The award is given to someone who has shown remarkable commitment to the Dominican Sisters of Houston.

Dr. Clifton, chief of neurosurgery at Memorial Hermann Hospital, and Archbishop Fiorenza were chosen as the 2005 recipients because of their help in caring for Sr. Miriam Ulm after her fall in Rome last summer. Both men visited Sr. Miriam in Rome and assisted in the process of returning her to Houston. Dr. Clifton provided medical care, and Archbishop Fiorenza pastoral care. The archbishop even organized a diocesan collection to defray Sr. Miriam’s medical costs. Sr. Miriam continues her recovery in a Houston care facility.


Houston and Sinsinawa Dominicans hosted a discernment weekend for young women. Houston Dominicans collaborated with Sinsinawa Dominicans in San Antonio and San Angelo, Texas, for a Vocation Discernment Weekend. Srs. Marygrace Peters, Pat Casey, Therese Warden, Lavergne Schwender, Ann Huffsteter and Ceil Roeger traveled to San Antonio along with three women from Houston who are discerning their vocations.

Veva McLain, a recipient of the 2004 Sister Pauline Gannon Recognition, passed away on March 14, 2006. She was honored last year for her involvement in the “Mane Train,” a group of women who volunteer to style the retired sisters’ hair at St. Dominic Villa.

Sr. Lydia Delgado celebrated her Silver Jubilee on January 21 after her original celebration was canceled due to Hurricane Rita.
Students at St. Vincente de Paul School in Guatemala dressed up and gave presentations on various careers as part of their Labor Day observance. The school is supported by the Dominican Sisters of Houston. If you are interested in making a donation or in sponsoring a student, contact Sr. Fran Boddeker at 713-747-3310, ext. 335.

Matching gifts are a way to increase your charitable giving. Many companies match employees’ donations. Check with your employer to see if they have matching gift forms available. Our Advancement Office can fill these out when included with your donation.

Sr. Mary Brenda sends word from Kenya that the impact from the drought and famine is visible all around. The sisters only have running water several days a week, which is more than many around them. The construction of St. Bakita Health Center of Utawala is under way. For more information about the clinic, visit http://www.sr.marybrenda.org.

In Memoriam

Mary Maximus (Edith Mae) Castle, O.P., entered into eternal life January 4, 2006, 72nd year of vowed life

Mary Cecilia (Corinne Maude) Barry, O.P., entered into eternal life February 15, 2006, 71st year of vowed life
Guess who!
The answer is on page 9.
‘We preach the Gospel by how we live’

BY SR. CEIL ROEGER

“As Dominicans we: challenge the systems that dominate and oppress our world, preach truth that liberates all; (engage in) study that develops and promotes the interrelatedness of all; pray to sustain hope and encourage a lifestyle that encourages equitable and mutually enhancing life for Earth community.” These are the opening words of the Dominican Call to Action that was adopted by the North American Dominican Justice Promoters. These words and those of our mission statement — “we commit to study and address the crucial justice issues of our times” — are at the heart of the role of the Promoter of Justice, Peace and Care of Creation. The title, though a mouthful, speaks to the commitment of the community to this statement. The role of the justice promoter is to research and provide information to the community in the areas of justice.

Three of the major issues that we are addressing at this time are the war in Iraq, Immigration and Human Trafficking. We cannot address these issues in isolation. We work closely with the Dominican family, Houston and global communities. We stand in solidarity with and take our lead from the people who are most directly involved in these issues.

“I Have Family in Iraq” is a theme adopted by the Dominicans throughout the world to pledge and show our support to not only the Dominicans in Iraq but to the Iraqi people in general. We continue to pray and stand in solidarity in a call for peace. From February 15 through March 20, members of Voices for Creative Nonviolence gathered in Washington to call for an end to the military and economic warfare in Iraq. Since we cannot be in Washington, our sisters have joined in a rolling fast and weekly prayer vigils. Along with the Catholic Bishops we are calling for a timely withdrawal of our troops and monetary commitment for the rebuilding of the infrastructure that has been damaged by years of war and sanctions.

The Dominican sisters have long been advocates for immigrants and in 1987 declared sanctuary. This meant that we would open our space as a haven for undocumented immigrants. We continue to work with the immigrant groups in the Houston area and support the Catholic Campaign for Immigration Reform launched by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops.

Related to immigration reform is the trip that Sisters Jane Abell, Eleanor Cresap and I took to El Salvador in December. It was the beginning of summer in El Salvador. Driving from the airport to San Salvador, you see the lush green of the countryside dotted with bright colors of roses, crepe myrtle trees, poinsettias and other flowers. If you take a closer look though, you see the poverty. The houses are make-shift of tin and wood. You may only occasionally see some made of adobe.

We went as members of the SHARE Foundation and while there visited several communities being assisted by SHARE. SHARE lends its support to community-based initiatives that encourage women’s empowerment, leadership development and community participation in partnership with already established Salvadoran organizations. What is apparent from this visit is that if the people are given a chance to make a living in their countries of origin they are less likely to want to immigrate to the United States.

War and poverty provide great opportunities for those who would exploit other human beings through use of violence, coercion and deception to take them away from their homes and their families. We are working with others to end such exploitation. In Houston, we are members of the Coalition Against Human Trafficking and of the Rescue and Restore Coalition. As members of these coalitions, we have participated in providing education and assisting the service agencies in working with victims.

We study these issues because our mission statement goes on to say that “we will assume the risks inherent in preaching and teaching the Gospel.” We preach the Gospel by how we live.
Sr. Amelia Akers

Sr. Amelia Akers will celebrate her Diamond Jubilee in August, marking her 60th year as a Dominican sister. When asked what aspect of the community she values most, Sr. Amelia can’t emphasize enough how much individuality means to her. “We respect each other as individuals and as people pursuing their goals as best as they are able,” she said of the Dominican Sisters of Houston.

And Sr. Amelia’s individuality is apparent. A Beaumont native, she had never lived anywhere else until she chose to join the Dominican Sisters at the age of 18. Having graduated from high school two years earlier, Sr. Amelia was working at St. Anthony Cathedral School when she first considered a religious vocation. She said that Sr. Helen Roessler had a strong impact on her notions about religious life. It was Sr. Helen’s “demeanor, her manner of dealing with the children” that touched Sr. Amelia and moved her to examine the Dominican charism.

After professing her first vows, Sr. Amelia was immediately sent out to teach. She said, “I always looked forward to the time I would come back [to the mother-house] and live here permanently.” As a young sister, she would return every summer and for long holidays, but it was only a temporary stop until she went back to her assignment or was sent to a new one.

One of Sr. Amelia’s favorite assignments was serving as the health resource librarian for St. Elizabeth Hospital’s Health Resource Center in Beaumont from 1986 to 1997. She especially enjoyed the interaction with the public she received at the Parkdale Mall location. “Cholesterol was a big deal then. When someone came in, you knew that’s what they would ask for,” Sr. Amelia provided information on whatever issues patrons had questions about.

She admits that the community changed after Vatican II. In fact, “everything changed except the vows we take.” But Sr. Amelia enjoyed the simple freedoms such as visiting with her parents more often. She has kept in touch with many of her former students and their families, forging lifelong friendships: “I feel that if we’re truthful with people – both in our personal relationships and as a community – our slogan ‘Veritas’ – they’re more inclined to understand us and our approach to life.”

Although officially retired, Sr. Amelia still holds several jobs at the mother-house. Along with serving as congregational archivist, she is a receptionist at both the administration offices and at St. Dominic Villa Retirement Home. “I feel like we are very fortunate people to have the Villa,” she said of the residence that offers both assisted living and medical care to the Dominican Sisters. Sr. Amelia also crochets constantly, making items for sale in the November Arts and Crafts Sale to benefit the Villa.

“We’re all different, and yet we’re on the same road and headed to the same destination,” she said of the community. “We’re permitted to be individuals. We’re not put into a mold. … I appreciate that I have something to do that I feel is important, that I have something to contribute.”

Guess Who Answer From Page 7

Sr. Antoinette Boykin is our mystery sister for this issue. She currently resides at St. Dominic Villa, where she is an avid painter and is active in the sisters’ prayer ministry.

Sr. Antoinette shared fond memories of her trip to the Grand Canyon with Sr. Clement, who passed away in 2004.
Joy Sacco’s Dominican upbringing

Dominicans worldwide have begun using the term “family” to describe people who share their life and mission, those who are close to the order for whatever reasons. By this definition, Joy Sacco was born into the Dominican Family.

“I started in kindergarten and went through college,” Joy said of her Dominican education. But she was familiar with the sisters before entering school.

Joy’s mother, Ellen Fisk, began driving the sisters from their Galveston convent to Sacred Heart Academy when Joy was very young. “Back then, we didn’t have seat belts. I would stand in the front seat, and one of the sisters would help hold me,” she said. “She’d go get one load and drop them off and go back for another.” Once Joy began kindergarten, she only rode along for the first sortie, then stayed at school with the sisters. She said it wasn’t an everyday affair because “sometimes they’d walk on nice days.”

Joy remembers the names of many of those Dominicans who had such an influence on her childhood:

“Sr. Antoinette was real strict, but so nice”

Sr. Mary Philip gave her pet cocker spaniel to Joy’s family, which they named Pal.

“Sr. Mary Edward taught me piano, and she tried to teach me violin, but it was a losing effort.”

There were also Dominicans yet-to-be in her circle. “Sr. Camilla [Micheletti] grew up about three blocks from us.” And, unbeknownst to Joy at the time, her husband Leonard and Sr. Theresa Macey were childhood friends.

The middle of the 20th Century was a different time, according to Joy, and that may have lent itself to her unique experience with the sisters. “I think we probably got to know the nuns better than they do now,” she said.

After graduating from college and having a family of her own, Joy “lost actual, physical contact with the sisters, but I’ve kept up with them.” Her ties to her Dominican family run deep.

John L. Marek lived a life in service to the underprivileged

Whatever John L. Marek did, he did it to the best of his ability, and he did it without pausing to rest.

Sr. Margaret Conrad remembers him on the roof of a St. Pius X High School building hammering away in the middle of an event. She had to step outside and ask him to stop because he was so focused on his task.

It was the same with his devotion to the poor. “Any time it was his birthday, he’d say, ‘Don’t give me anything, just give me a donation to St. Vincent de Paul,’” said his sister-in-law Sr. Mary Magdalene Hanel.

Growing up in Yoakum, Texas, during the depression, John L. left school in the 6th grade. He grew up to begin his own business, though, and found ways to help others. From the founding of three St. Vincent de Paul Thrift Stores to the building of St. Vincent de Paul Village to employing men from half-way houses, John L. offered others a chance to find dignity and make a better life for themselves.

He passed away on Feb. 16 at the age of 88.

Do you have a “Dominican Family Tie”? If so, contact Heather Narbit at 713-747-3310, ext. 335, or e-mail her at hnarbit@domhous.org. We want to hear your story!
Calendar of Events

Thursdays in Lent: Lenten Labyrinth at 5:30 p.m.
June 18–24: Girls’ summer camp
August 5: Sisters’ Jubilees
August 8: St. Dominic Day
Sept 29: Founders’ Days

For more information, contact the Dominican Sisters at 713-747-3310.

Sr. Kitty Carter and Sr. Edwardo Daly share a smile at St. Dominic Villa.