

**THE RULE**  
**OF**  
**THE LAY FRATERNITIES**  
**OF SAINT DOMINIC**

Renewed and adapted at the request of  
the (1983) General Chapter of Rome  
by delegates of the Dominican Laity  
assembled at Montreal (1985)  
at the convocation of  
the Master of the Order.



Definitively Approved  
by the Vatican Congregation  
for Religious and Secular Institutes

Promulgated by  
fr. Damian Byrne, O.P.  
Master of the Order

Rome  
1987

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**CONGREGATION FOR RELIGIOUS  
AND SECULAR INSTITUTES**

Prot. No. D. 37-1 / 78

**DECREE**

The Master General of the Order of [Friars] Preachers on March 14, 1986 through the Procurator General, sent this Congregation the text of the *Rule of the Lay Fraternities of Saint Dominic* in order to obtain a definitive approval of this text.

After mature consideration, and with the favorable vote of the [Montreal] Assembly, this Congregation by the present decree approves the *Rule of the Lay Fraternities of Saint Dominic*, according to the Latin text, together with the corrections of the Assembly presented in the attached letter. A copy is being kept in the Congregation's Archives.

Anything to the contrary notwithstanding.

Given at Rome on January 15, 1987.

fr. Jerome Cardinal Hamer, O.P.  
Prefect

Archbishop Vincent Fagiolo  
Secretary

To the Lay Fraternities of Saint Dominic:

Dear Brothers and Sisters in the Lord and Dominic:

Joyfully I give you the text of the Rule of the Lay Fraternities of Saint Dominic, which has very recently (January 15, 1987) been definitively approved by the Congregation for Religious and Secular Institutes.

The text of the former rule, promulgated by Fr. Aniceto Fernandez in 1969, was approved by the Holy See only on an experimental basis in 1972. The General Chapter held in Rome in 1983 commissioned the Master of the Order to hold an international meeting of the lay fraternities in order to renew and adapt the rule of the lay fraternities. This meeting, held in Montreal, Canada, June 24-29, 1985, produced the text which is now definitively approved.

Let this rule be in your hearts and in your fraternities as a gospel leaven to foster holiness and promote the apostolate together with the whole Dominican Family.

Greetings in the Lord.

Given at Rome, January 28, 1987,  
on the feast of Saint Thomas Aquinas.

fr. Damian Byrne, O.P.  
Master of the Order

fr. J. Martin, OP  
Secretary

Prot. 50/86/87

# **RULE FOR THE LAY FRATERNITIES OF SAINT DOMINIC**

(NOTE: The Title “Lay Fraternities” can be expressed in a different way according to the usage of different languages.)

## **I**

### **The Fundamental Constitution of the Dominican Laity**

#### *Laity in the Church*

1. Among the disciples of Christ, men and women living in the world, in virtue of Baptism and Confirmation, have been made sharers in the prophetic, priestly and royal office of our Lord Jesus Christ.

They are called to this so that Christ’s presence may be brought to life in the midst of all peoples and *to make the divine message of salvation known and accepted by all men throughout the world.*<sup>1</sup>

#### *Dominican Laity*

2. Indeed, some of these, moved by the Holy Spirit to live their lives according to the spirit and charism of Saint Dominic, are incorporated into the Order by a special commitment according to their own statutes.

#### *Dominican Family*

3. Gathered together in communities, with other groupings of the Order, they constitute one Family.<sup>2</sup>

#### *The Specific Character of the Dominican Laity*

4. They are, accordingly, marked in a special way first in a proper spiritual life, then in their service to God and neighbor in the Church. As members of the Order, they share in its apostolic mission, study, prayer and preaching according to the proper state of lay persons.

#### *The Apostolic Mission*

5. Strengthened in their fraternal communion, they first of all bear witness to their own faith, listening to the needs of the people of their own time and serving the truth. This is done according to the example of Saint Dominic, Saint Catherine of Siena and our forebears who have illumined the life of the Order and the Church.
6. They carefully consider the principal goals of the contemporary apostolate of the Church, driven in a special way to show a genuine mercy toward all who are troubled, to espouse the cause of liberty, and to promote justice and peace.
7. Inspired by the charism of the Order, they are mindful that their apostolic activity proceeds from an abundance of contemplation.

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<sup>1</sup> Vatican Council II, *Apostolicam actuositatem* Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity, 3, par. 3.

<sup>2</sup> Book of the Constitutions and Ordinations of the Friars of the Order of Preachers (*LCO*), 141.

## II THE LIFE OF FRATERNITIES

### *Life of the Fraternities*

8. In true fraternal communion, they are to live to the best of their ability inspired by the beatitudes, which they also are to express in every circumstance by exercising the works of mercy and by sharing what they have with the members of the fraternities, especially the poor and the sick; by offering prayers for the deceased; so that all may ever have one heart and one mind in God <sup>a</sup>.
9. Desiring a part in the apostolate of the Order with their brothers and sisters, members of the fraternities are to participate actively in the life of the Church, always prepared to work hard with other apostolic associations.
10. These are the chief sources from which the laity of Saint Dominic draw strength to advance in their own vocation, which is a contemplative one most closely joined to an apostolic one at the same time:
  - a. listening to the Word of God and reading the Sacred Scripture, especially the New Testament;
  - b. daily participation (to the extent possible) in the celebration of the liturgy and participation in the Eucharistic sacrifice;
  - c. frequent celebration of the Sacrament of Reconciliation;
  - d. celebration of the Liturgy of the Hours with the entire Dominican Family, as well as prayer in private, such as meditation and the Marian Rosary.
  - e. conversion of heart according to the spirit and practice of evangelical penance;
  - f. assiduous study of revealed truth and constant reflection on contemporary problems, under the light of faith.
  - g. devotion to the Virgin Mary, according to the tradition of the Order, to our father Saint Dominic and to Saint Catherine of Siena;
  - h. periodic spiritual retreats.

### *Formation*

11. The purpose of Dominican formation is to provide for true adults in the Faith, so that they may be ready to welcome, celebrate and proclaim the word of God.

It belongs to each province to draw up a program:

- a. whether of gradual formation for beginners;
  - b. or of permanent formation for all, even for members apart from a fraternity.
12. Every Dominican must be prepared to preach the Word of God.

In this preaching the prophetic office of the baptized Christian is exercised.

13. These are the principal sources to accomplish Dominican formation:
  - the Word of God and theological reflection;
  - liturgical prayer;
  - the history and tradition of the Order;
  - more recent documents of the Church and the Order;
  - awareness of the signs of our times.

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<sup>a</sup> Acts 4:32.

### *Profession*

14. In order to be incorporated to the Order, members are bound to make profession, that is a commitment in which they formally promise to live a life according to the spirit of Saint Dominic and the way of life prescribed by the Rule.

This profession is either temporary or perpetual.

The following or a substantially similar formula is to be used for making profession:

To the honor of almighty God,  
Father, Son and Holy Spirit,  
and of Blessed Mary, ever-Virgin,  
and of Saint Dominic,  
I, \_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_,  
before you \_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_, the Prior /Prioress (President) of this fraternity,  
and \_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_, here present,  
in place of the Master of the Order of Friars Preachers,  
promise to live  
according to the Rule of the Lay Fraternities of Saint Dominic  
[for three years *or* for life].

## **THE STRUCTURE AND GOVERNANCE OF THE FRATERNITIES**

15. The Fraternity is a suitable means for the dedication of each person to the nourishment and growth in his or her own vocation.

The frequency of meetings differs according to the fraternity. The assiduity of each member demonstrates his or her own fidelity.

### *Reception*

16. The admission of candidates, while observing the arrangements prescribed by the Directory with respect to the state of persons and time of admission, is committed to a responsible lay person, who proceeds to the reception of the candidate with a rite determined by the Directory, with a Religious Assistant, after having received the decisive vote of the Council of the Fraternity.

### *Profession*

17. After the time of probation determined by the Directory and with a favorable vote of the Council of the Fraternity, the responsible lay person receives the profession, together with the Religious Assistant, receives the profession, either temporary or perpetual.

### *Jurisdiction of the Order and Autonomy of the Fraternities*

18. Lay Fraternities are under the jurisdiction of the Order; however, they enjoy that autonomy proper to the laity, by which they may govern themselves.

### *Governance in the Whole Order*

- 19 a. The Master of the Order, as successor of Saint Dominic and head of the entire Dominican Family, presides over all the fraternities in the world. It belongs to him to preserve the integral spirit of the order in them, to establish practical norms according to the needs of specific times and places and to promote the spiritual good and apostolic zeal of the members.
- b. The Promoter General represents the Master of the Order for all the fraternities, and transmits their desires to the Master or the General Chapter.

### *Governance in the Province*

- 20 a. The Prior Provincial presides over the fraternities within the territorial limits of his province, and with the consent of the Local Ordinary, erects new fraternities.
- b. The Provincial Promoter (brother or sister) represents the Prior Provincial and participates with full right in the Provincial Council of the Laity of Saint Dominic.  
  
The Promoter is nominated by the Provincial Chapter or by the Prior Provincial with his Council, having consulted the Provincial Council of the Laity of Saint Dominic.
- c. The Provincial Council of the Laity of Saint Dominic is to be established in the territory of the province. Its members are to be elected by the fraternities and to be regulated according to the norms defined by the Directory.

It belongs to this Council to elect the provincial President.

### *Governance in Fraternities*

- 21a. A local Fraternity is governed by a President with his or her Council, who assumes the full responsibility for direction and administration.
- b. The Council is elected for a specific time and in the manner established by particular Directories. The President is elected by the councilors from among the members of the Council.
- c. The Religious Assistant (brother or sister) assists members in doctrinal matters and the spiritual life. He or she is nominated by the Prior Provincial, having consulted the Provincial Promoter and the local Laity Council.

### *National and International Councils*

22. a. Where there are several Provinces of the Order within the territory of the same nation, a National Council can be instituted, according to the norms established by particular Directories.
  - b. An International Council can be formed in a similar way if, it seems opportune, after the fraternities of the entire Order have been consulted.
23. Councils of the fraternities can send their desires and petitions to the Provincial Chapter of the Friars Preachers; but Provincial and National Councils can send these to the General Chapter. Some representatives may be willingly invited to these chapters to discuss matters pertaining to the laity.

*Statutes of the Fraternities*

24. The proper statutes of the Lay Fraternities of Saint Dominic are:

- a. The Rule of the Fraternities (Fundamental Constitution of the Laity of the Order of Preachers, the norms of life and governance of the fraternities);
- b. the General Declarations, either of the Master of the Order or the General Chapters;
- c. particular Directories.

To complete this legislation for the Lay Fraternities of Saint Dominic, by the authority vested in me, I approve and promulgate the following “General Declarations for the Rule of the Lay Fraternities of Saint Dominic”. The observance of the Rule may thus take place more easily and with more spiritual fruit.

Given at Rome, on February 16, 1987.

fr. Damian Byrne, O.P.  
Master of the Order

fr. J. Martin, O.P.  
Secretary

## **General Declarations for the Rule of the Lay Fraternities of Saint Dominic**

1. The Rule, by which the Lay Fraternities of Saint Dominic are governed, is the fundamental law for the lay fraternities of the whole world; these present *General Declarations*, promulgated by the Master of the Order, are explanations or interpretations of the aforementioned Rule; provincial or national *Directories*, drafted by the fraternities themselves “should be approved by the corresponding provincial chapter(s) of the province(s) in which these entities are established”<sup>a</sup>; [they] are particular norms for local fraternities.
2. So that lay brethren and sisters may fulfill their obligations, “not like slaves under the law, but like free persons under grace”, we declare that transgressions do not constitute a moral fault.
3. Superiors of fraternities can legitimately dispense from the prescriptions of the Rule and the Directory, for a determined time or habitually, if they deem it opportune.
4. Priors Provincial have the power to convalidate invalid acts of a fraternity, particularly regarding admissions to profession or commitment.
5. In addition to lay fraternities, for which this Rule is intended, there are also priestly fraternities, which are governed by their own rule.
6. Individual Directories should determine, among other things:
  - a) conditions for admission to the Fraternity;
  - b) the time or probation and profession or commitment;
  - c) the frequency of sacraments and prayers which lay brethren and sisters should raise to God daily;
  - d) the frequency of meetings of the fraternities and the form for their celebration, as well as the frequency for conferences on spirituality;
  - e) both the internal constitution of each fraternity as well as the common constitution of the fraternities of one province or nation;
  - f) the manner for holding the election of those officers about whom the Rule makes no specific determination;
  - g) the manner and limitations of dispensation;
  - h) prayers for departed brethren and sisters and for the whole Order.
7. The Rosary, by which the mind is raised to an intimate contemplation of the mysteries of Christ through the mediation of the Blessed Virgin Mary, is a traditional devotion of the Order; therefore its daily recitation is commended to the lay brethren and sisters of Saint Dominic.

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<sup>a</sup> Cf. the 1992 General Chapter (Mexico), no. 201.

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