**OPENING ADDRESS - MARGARET BUTLER OP**

**THE CHALLENGES OF LIVING OUT THE DOMINICAN CHARISM IN AOTEAROA NEW ZEALAND, MOVING FORWARD TOGETHER AS ONE FAMILY**

**SLIDE 1**

**SLIDE 2**

What are the challenges of living out the Dominican charism in Aotearoa New Zealand, moving together as one family?

Easy, I thought, geography, distance, finance, age, monoculture, biculture, succession, resources, identity, rules or no rules, belonging, mission . . **SLIDE 3**

What can you add? The list just keeps on coming. But you all know these aspects of our lives and these challenges, so what is behind them? What do we really want to explore and reflect on over these days? Apart from marking 800 years of Dominican life why are we gathering?

I would like to suggest that there is one word that covers all the challenges - ***COMMUNICATION***  **SLIDE 4**

I want to explore with you how this word connects with our charism and how it could guide us as a key word at least for a while.

Whenever I explain to people that OP stands for Order of Preachers I see their eyes go funny, their skin blanche and withdrawal set in. Many of us hear 'Preacher' as someone who talks AT us from a place of superiority. That is not my experience of being part of the Order of Preachers so there must be another meaning of preacher. 'Proclaimer' is good, 'evangeliser' is a bit creepy, 'teacher' is too restricted and other terms don't seem to fit. Recently I was listening again to the story of Zacchaeus. **SLIDE 5**

Jesus looked up at this little man in a tree and brought Good News in a simple invitation. In fact he COMMUNICATED with Zacchaeus. There was an interaction between the two and a relationship developed. So Communication became my key word, with Relationship as its sibling. *Communication and Relationship* seem to me to summarise all the challenges we face as we attempt to live out the Dominican Charism in Aotearoa New Zealand. I want to explore how these terms can give us a focus as we live and work together in our unique situation.

*Communication* is a two-way process, or even a multifaceted one. I cannot communicate on my own. In addition, if I am only giving information I will quickly run out of things to say or proclaim. The person listening will soon stop listening. As Dominicans we only have to think of Dominic. In the inn he surely didn't spend the whole night in a one-to-one discussion telling the innkeeper what he should be thinking. He would have listened carefully, digested what he heard and shared his own beliefs. Perhaps his experience of the Cathar/ Albigensianism beliefs was so new that he was still in shock. Later in his life he was part of what we would now call a full and frank group intellectual discussion about the varying beliefs held by himself and the heretics. Remember the book burning incident? True beliefs would survive burning - and Dominic's did. **SLIDE 6**

Yet another form of communication, social communication, was shown in the delight he shared with the women, especially the young ones, in the convent he established. **SLIDE 7**

In all of these situations Dominic was communicating Truth, wisdom and joy. He didn't need a pulpit, but he did need prayer, study, reflection and community support.

There is a strong similarity between '*Communication*' and '*Communion',* yet another reason why *communication* could sum up all our challenges. Communion, in both its sacramental sense and its secular sense implies a strong sense of unity, of belonging. When I asked a few people what they saw as one challenge it was interesting that *belonging* came through very strongly, a desire to be part of a group beyond myself, a group that holds *some* similar values and still challenges me to grow. In the desire to belong there is a wish to communicate at various levels, physical, emotional and spiritual. There is a desire to relate to one another in the Dominican Family.

While the Dominican Family as a whole fulfils this need for some, others appreciate what they find in smaller Dominican Family groups. In these small local groups there is an opportunity be real with one another, to get to know a few others at a deeper level. The traditional patterns of prayer, study and mission can become more fruitful as our individual interests and visions enrich the group. Time can be taken to share stories of one's life, to share the hunger for truth, to share the ordinariness of our journey. **SLIDE 8**

**SLIDE 9**

Timothy Radcliffe recounts the story of a novice who had entered the Order bright-eyed and bushy tailed, full of enthusiasm and zest for mission. He slipped into disillusionment and became a different person. When he was questioned about this the novice complained that the heroes who had attracted him into the Order had feet of clay. One was lazy, another never tidied up in the kitchen, another left his towel on the floor in the bathroom, another hogged the community TV and had the volume up too loud. His heroes were all flawed human beings, not worthy of being admired. Unexpectedly, the novice was congratulated for reaching this stage. He was now able to let go of admiring heroes and was ready to learn to love real people whose deep goodness he would gradually discover.

So it can be with smaller groups where we can be ordinary. We can be so committed to study that we amaze ourselves with our erudition. See how I slip into big words! Perhaps I can be too shy to say that I don't understand what we are studying, or that it doesn't appeal to me. Communication gets frozen. If we acknowledge the need to belong and if we take time to share our own story, some particular enthusiasm, or a current grief or need, we open our ordinariness to one another and true communication can exist. The desire to belong begins to be fulfilled. Encouraging such smaller groups where we can meet the ordinary other may give us confidence to share our ordinariness when we meet in larger groups . **SLIDE 1O**

This awareness of belonging in our ordinariness also helps us to be aware of others we meet on mission, opening our eyes, ears and hearts to hear their stories, to get behind their masks, to truly communicate. **SLIDE 11**

Small group communication or interaction also means that we are able to support one another in our particular interests. One of the group might be interested in and passionate about international underwater hockey. **SLIDE 12**

This may initially bore me rigid but by listening carefully I may learn what drives the underwater hockey fan and I become able to support the values that have been discovered in this sport. A great example of this type of support, on a much more serious level, is shown in the story of the Dominican Antonio de Montesinos. ( Wikipedia gives us a good account)

In the 16th century, in the Caribbean, Antonio de Montesinos spoke out against the injustices of the slavery of the indigenous people. **SLIDE13**

**Tell me by what right of justice do you hold these Indians in such a cruel and horrible servitude? On what authority have you waged such detestable wars against these people who dealt quietly and peacefully on their own lands?**

The colonists were stunned and outraged. Governor Columbus, responding to the petitions of the colonists, asked the Dominicans to punish Montesinos and retract all that he had said. The Dominicans refused and took things even further, informing Columbus that Montesinos spoke for all of them.

Montesinos and his fellow Dominicans were eventually able to convince the King of the moral correctness of their point of view, thus paving the way for later laws which protected native rights in Spanish lands.

Not everyone in the community spoke out but they showed their solidarity with Montesinos. What he said was also their message. The commitment of the whole group to the prophecy of the one changed the world. Montesinos belonged to the smaller group and clearly had been communicating with them about his call to challenge the situation in the Caribbean. The communication that can happen in our smaller groups in this country enhances the sense of belonging and increases our confidence as we move together in this country developing a particular version of Dominican Family.

Communication comes in various forms each of which can contribute to our sense of belonging and our living out of the mission to preach the gospel. Without pausing for breath we could name many forms of communication : words, song, art, craft, dance TV internet, social media. These all need to be explored and used but just at this moment I want to look at a form of communication that is comparatively new to us - communication with planet Earth and beyond.

**SLIDE14**

Recently we have been reading in *Laudato Si'* about care of the earth as a new corporal work of mercy. What does that mean? What has that got to do with preaching or communication?

**SLIDE 15**

As I mentioned before communication calls for listening as well as speaking. I also believe that communication involves all our senses, seeing, touching, feeling, smelling as well as hearing. There are also the other senses - intuition, sixth sense and so on. We are gradually learning that Earth has much to tell us. In our New Zealand Dominican Family we are indebted to those who have worked hard to help us to appreciate the importance of this planet and our call to live sensitively in it.

**SLIDE 16**

We are challenged to listen carefully to the world around us, to see the macrocosm and the microcosm with new eyes, to listen with our eyes. We are challenged to come to grips with scientific discoveries, to understand economic decisions and to learn what needs to be encouraged and what needs to be challenged with the passion of Montesinos. We are called to live sustainably so that we can survive to future generations. I suggest that we are also called to use all our senses to communicate with Earth, for the future of the planet which will probably survive long after we as humans have gone! We care for Earth not just for us humans but for the whole planet. We need to use all our skills to listen to what Earth is saying to us and to work out how we can communicate our insights.

Many of our insights and interpretations of our place in this planet come from our culture. If you look around you will see that most of us are representative of a New Zealand culture of some years ago. We are white, middle-aged or older, from families that by and large have been here for several generations. Our challenge is once again *communication­*  with people of other cultures. As we listen to and communicate with people from other cultures it is fascinating to find how many of our recently arrived New Zealanders have Dominican connections. Fortunately most I have met have enjoyed knowing Dominicans! Our common heritage is mutually beneficial and is so helpful as we try to be part of the welcoming body in a changing country.

**SLIDE 17**

Over the years there has been a constant call to understand the culture of the tangata whenua. Before (and yet at the same time that) we welcome migrants and refugees there has been the urgent call to understand the history of this country and to reverence the first peoples. Fortunately we have been helped to do this by the hard, respectful and insightful world of people with Dominican connections, members of our Dominican family. **SLIDE 18** **SLIDE 19**

Through them we have learned to communicate our shared and different values. What are the challenges that face us as Dominican Family as we try to live justly with the tangata whenua. What can we learn from them? Do we as Dominicans have anything to offer? How can we continue to learn from the experience and wisdom of those amongst us who have insights and experience that many of us don't have? How can we communicate....?

As we look at the challenges that face us, and the call to communicate the gift of the good news, there are two INTER words that leap to mind: International and Intergenerational.

**SLIDE 20**

**International**

We know that there are advantages in living a long way from the 'centre of the universe'. We know that we are growing a unique form of Dominican Family, especially in the Lay Dominican branch.

However, much of the wisdom we share is enriched by connections with international bodies. We don't need to imitate any other group but we have much to learn and much to give if we develop and maintain international connections. Who knows, our model may well become the default model world-wide! How can we do this? I suspect that if we try to do a big picture effort we will all die of exhaustion and frustration. I have been dreaming of a 'buddy system'. Would it work if each small group around the country made contact with Dominicans in some part of the world and set up ways of mutually supporting one another?

**SLIDE 21**

Some of the wisdom we gather is shared on the website, in our small groups, in regional groups or nationally. The Friars and the Sisters already have international connections but I suspect they could be brought to life in a way that we can't even begin to imagine. Different forms of the lay branch of the family exist, from the very formal traditional Dominican laity through associates, to our embryonic form. Do we want to explore the different forms? Do we want to communicate with the real people who make up our Dominican Family? Do we want to make and sustain these connections?

**INTERGENERATIONAL** **SLIDE 22** **SLIDE 23**

**SLIDE 24**

During this year of jubilee schools which have a Dominican connection have celebrated extraordinarily well. School staff, Diocesan teams, Dominican Sisters, Friars and laity have joined together for small and large celebrations. What encouraging events. How are we as Dominican Family going to keep in touch with this generation? Are we ready to be transformed by them? Do we want to become a club of retirees or are we ready to face the challenge of supporting the next generation and contributing in some way to the formation of those who might be attracted by the Dominican spirit?

If we look at the intergenerational issue in terms of communication I wonder how we can best listen mutually, receive the gift of the gospel from the younger generation as well as proclaim it to them, I used to love being with younger people. Now I have little contact and know that in their eyes I am one of the wrinklies, or whatever is the current term for the very old. However, I know that grandparents and adopted grandparents have a special place in the lives of young people. Perhaps we can develop something like that in our Dominican Family.

**SLIDE 25**

Young adults bring great energy to our country. Our challenge as Dominican Family is, I think, to support those who are already working with youth and to imagine how we can share the Dominican charism with young adults. We do this not to increase the Dominican Family as such but to provide young people with the passion for Christ and for truth and justice that is characteristic of the Dominican Family.

**SLIDE 26**

**Mission/ministry/project**

From time to time I have been involved in discussions about mission. The

suggestion is that we need a common mission. 'If we are to be Dominican we

need to be recognisable, to have a common mission'. In my struggle to

understand this I look around the group and wonder how this can be. We

have come from so many backgrounds, have so many different experiences,

how can we have a common mission without turning ourselves into knots and

completely changing our lives?

For a long time the only way I could cope with this question was to refuse to

get involved in the discussion. This was not a good solution as I really was

interested in how we could be recognised as Dominicans rather than Jesuits or

anybody else. It became clear that there was a challenge of communication.

Are we able to take the time and make the effort to really listen to one another

as we explore this issue at this time in this country?

One day I read some of Timothy Radcliffe's work where he talks about

Dominicans being sent out to preach the reign of God and then gathered again

into unity. In our Jubilee heading we use 'Sent to preach the gospel'. Perhaps

we need to expand that to ' Sent to preach the gospel and re-gathered

in unity' Both parts are needed, I suggest.

The common mission is this being sent to preach and re-gathered in unity. The

details vary according to our situations. When we re-gather it is to refresh and

to communicate. How could the members of community of Montesinos

support him if they had not communicated with one another when they

gathered?

I think that I have been confused because I had not clarified the difference

between a common mission, common ministry and a common project. From

time to time, as in this jubilee year, it is possible to have a common project, a

clearly defined goal, a project that is clearly recognisable and for a certain

time. I suggest that the challenge is for us to use projects only from time to

time. Life will come from a commitment to reflect on our common projects

and to support one another in the multitude of ways that the mission is

carried out. We do not have common ministry. Indeed our strength is the

variety of ministries that are ways of living the common mission. We need to

help one another discern how our various activities and interests are part of

the Dominican Mission. We need to communicate carefully, creatively and

with great trust.

We are challenged to continue to explore the interrelationship between

mission, ministry and projects.

Timothy Radcliffe suggests that we are wasting energy if we focus on preaching

in the pulpit. He makes a distinction between a homilist and a preacher. He

acknowledges the hurt behind the decision regarding pulpit preaching but

encourages us to look for other ways to preach. He reminds us that Dominic's

way was to preach wherever he was, on the road, in the inn . . .

When I was a child at Dominican schools I was already being told that there

were lots of ways to preach. After Vatican II this became a stronger message,

though sometimes the variety of ways and places seemed second best

opportunities.

Do we really believe that we are all called to live out our baptism, we are all

called to the gospel, that Dominicans are especially called to this mission?

One of the exciting challenges for us is to explore and recognise the many

different ways of preaching that are right in front of us.

**SLIDE 27**

**SLIDE 28**

Let's look at one form of preaching.

People who know me also know that I am not a gardener. I love gardens, but

not the process of getting there. Over recent years I have seen and heard the

preaching of gardeners in our midst. I have seen the development of a

beautiful garden in a tiny urban section. The planning, care and vision have

influenced more than the gardener would know. I have seen and experienced

the development of the Korimako Ecological centre and its influence on a

wide group of people. The flexibility of vision in responding to the needs of the

people in the area of any creed and none is a life-giving form of preaching.

The mixture of art and gardening that many of us have witnessed has borne

fruit in a deep and challenging form of preaching. Each of these ventures

could be carried out in isolation but these ones have been in the context of

Dominican life and family and have thus become part of the preaching mission.

**SLIDE 29**

**SLIDE 30**

**SLIDE 31**

We have looked at some aspects of communication - the desire to belong,

communication with other groups, international and intergenerational

possibilities, communication when we are sent out on mission or re-gathered

into community. Behind all this is the challenging question - why bother? We

have only a few minutes here to look at this but we are at the crux of why we

belong to the Dominican Family in this country at this time. Remember that

David Kammler stressed *Dominic does not focus on himself, he always*

*points us to Christ.*

**SLIDE 32**

Ultimately we are urged by God who is relational.

God who sent the Word to show God's love, to call us into that relationship,

form us and send us out on mission. We are constantly being sent and re-

gathered. Even though we acknowledge our mission to spread the gospel and

re-gather in unity there is another point of view to consider. Tony Gittens, a

speaker at various educational gatherings and the Mixed Commission of

Bishops and Congregational Leaders reminds us that God is mission and that

the mission has the church. We could paraphrase it to say that the Mission has

the Dominicans.

We Dominicans need to keep returning to our roots so that the message

being communicated is the Word of God. We can learn from Dominic himself

who, on selling his books to care for the poor kept the gospel of Matthew and

the letters of Paul.

Next week liturgically we return to the gospel of Matthew. I

suggest that we could all commit ourselves to a prayerful reflection on this

gospel for 2017. It has much to say to us. In brief - it reminds us of the long

tradition, looking back through the history of salvation and onward to ' the

ends of the earth'. If we look closely we can recognise our four pillars -

community - the formation of the disciples and apostles; study - the sermon

on the mount ; prayer- personal and communal and the Our Father; mission -

preaching to the whole world.

Study, reflection on the gospel, communication in small and large groups,

absorbing our learnings into our daily lives and the Dominican mission could

give us a focus to more deeply live out the Dominican charism, reaching

beyond our own experience to people of other cultures, to situations that shift

and change with startling rapidity. We can help one another to hear more

clearly the call to follow, to be sent, to re-gather, to communicate. We can

become more fully 'gospel people of prayer'.

Each one of us in the Dominican Family will hear the gospel of Matthew from

our own worldview.

Our sharing, communicating in many ways, art, writing, talks, discussions, song,

care of the needy, working for justice, parenting, living patiently with pain and

illness. Communicating our experiences to one another and beyond our own

circle will help us live out our mottoes - Truth; To praise, to bless, to preach;

To contemplate and pass on to others the fruits of our contemplation. This we

can do as Family. **SLIDE 33**

I found this next passage on the internet. It is about what I call Communication's sibling - relationship

So what does the Dominican charism mean today? It means we are sisters and brothers who are preachers. We have chosen to be sisters or brothers of humanity. We have chosen to be in relationship, kinship, with those who feel close in faith and in the Church, but also in relationship to those who are not. We believe that relationship, being family, is a gift of God to the world.  
Dominic made this choice in his time when he began preaching. He decided to be close to the people thus giving an example of humanity and life in community.

**jpsiloam.net/category/dominican-circle/**

The relationship that is God, the relationships that Dominic developed, the relationships we experience in the Dominican Family can all be activated, expressed in the one word I have been exploring tonight - communication.

**SLIDE 34**

Joyful friar,

Tolerant master,

Grace-filled preacher.

Gospel man of prayer

Pray that your sons and daughters

May be faithful to your heritage

Of common life

Common prayer

Study

And service

And that other men and women will join them

To praise

To bless

And to preach

That Jesus Christ is Lord.  Amen

**SLIDE 34**

**SLIDE 35**