

**THE RULE  
FOR  
THE PRIESTLY FRATERNITIES  
OF SAINT DOMINIC**

**Definitively Approved  
by the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life  
and Societies of Apostolic Life.**



**Promulgated by  
fr. Timothy Radcliffe, O.P.  
Master of the Order**

**Rome 1996**

*English Translation, Chicago and Melbourne, 2002*



**CONGREGATION FOR INSTITUTES OF CONSECRATED LIFE  
AND SOCIETIES OF APOSTOLIC LIFE**

DECREE

**Prot. N.D. 37-1/96**

The Procurator General of the Order of Friars Preachers, in the name of the Master General of that Order, humbly requested that the “Rule for the Priestly Fraternities of Saint Dominic”, which was approved *ad experimentum* on 4 January 1972 (Prot. N. 980/71), now be definitively approved.

The Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, having considered these presentations and fully weighing all things pertaining to this matter, approves and confirms the aforesaid Rule, according to its Latin text, observing what is to be observed in law. A copy of this rule is retained in the Congregation’s archives.

Anything else to the contrary notwithstanding.

Given at the Vatican, December 3, 1996.

Edwardo Cardinal Martinez Somalo

*Prefect*

Fr. Jesus Torres, C.M.F.

*Undersecretary*

# Rule for the Priestly Fraternities of Saint Dominic

## FOREWORD

Priests, set apart in the heart of the people of God, but not separated from the world, are by virtue of their special vocation and ordination fully consecrated to the work of salvation through the fulfillment of the priestly ministry as “*witnesses and stewards of a life other than the life here on earth.*”<sup>1</sup>

Hence there is a special reason why they are not to become conformed to this world<sup>a</sup> but to use all their faculties in a constant effort to acquire evangelical perfection, so that they may always be more configured to Christ in their minds and become living instruments of his eternal priesthood, with a view to building up his Church in the world.<sup>2</sup>

Those, however, who, urged by supernatural grace, enroll in the Order of Saint Dominic, profess a rule of perfection suited to their state. In this way they become members of special communities called “the Priestly Fraternities of Saint Dominic” and add a new reason for pursuing greater perfection before God and the world.

Along with the special grace of the Sacrament of Holy Orders, which helps these priests to perform the acts of the sacred ministry worthily<sup>3</sup>, they receive new spiritual helps from the profession which makes them members of the Dominican Family and sharers in the grace and mission of the Order to the sure advantage of the local and universal Church.

However, while the Order provides them with these spiritual aids and directs them to their own sanctification, it leaves them free for the complete service of the local Church, under the jurisdiction of their own Bishop.

## I THE CHARACTER AND LIFE OF THE PRIEST FRATERNITIES

1. §1 Priests who join the Order in this way, with a view to being a part of the Dominican Family, “strive to be imbued with the spirit of Saint Dominic” and tend “to a more perfect apostolic life”<sup>4</sup>, so that from the assiduous contemplation of God which unites untiring study of Sacred Scriptures with fervent prayer and voluntary poverty, they attain a firm faith and an apostolic spirit which is fully concerned for the salvation “of every creature”<sup>b</sup> “to the ends of the earth”<sup>c</sup>
- §2 In the practice of the apostolate we have, after the Apostles themselves, the magnificent example of our Holy Father Dominic, “a most holy priest of God”<sup>5</sup> who “shared his days with his neighbors, his nights with God”<sup>6</sup> and “used all his powers and a most fervent zeal to gain as many souls as possible for Christ; and in his heart there was an astounding and almost incredible eagerness for the salvation of souls.”<sup>7</sup>
2. Mindful of their sublime vocation, the presbyters of Saint Dominic “should labor at preaching and teaching”<sup>d</sup>, “believing what they have read and meditated upon in the Law of the Lord, teaching what they believe, and practicing what they teach”.<sup>8</sup> In

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<sup>1</sup> Vatican Council II, *Presbyterium Ordinis* Decree on the Ministry and Life of Presbyters, no. 3.

<sup>a</sup> Romans 12:2.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, no. 12.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, no. 12.

<sup>4</sup> *Rule of Master of the Order Louis Theissing*, nos. 7 and 21.

<sup>b</sup> Mark 16:15.

<sup>c</sup> Acts 1:8.

<sup>5</sup> Prayer of Blessed Jordan of Saxony to Saint Dominic.

<sup>6</sup> Jordan of Saxony, *Book on the Beginnings of the Order of Preachers*, no.106.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, no. 34.

<sup>d</sup> 1 Tim 5:17.

<sup>8</sup> Vatican Council II, *Lumen gentium* Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, no 28.

this way they are true “educators” of the people “in faith”<sup>9</sup> and preachers of the Gospel in the world.

3. Since, by reason of their pastoral office, they live in the world, they should develop those human virtues which make their ministry credible to the people, such as “goodness, sincerity, mental strength and constancy, assiduous concern for justice, civility”<sup>10</sup>, generosity, and every other virtue which makes them lovable to all in the Lord<sup>e</sup>. If they do this, what was written about Saint Dominic can be said about them, that “he received all persons in the great heart of his charity, and since he loved everyone, he was loved by all. ‘To rejoice with those who rejoice and mourn with those who weep’<sup>f</sup> he made his own, abounding in piety and giving himself fully to the care of his neighbors”.<sup>11</sup>

### **Profession in the Order**

4. §1 Presbyters who persevere in their intention and decide to follow the way of Saint Dominic, so that they may be more strongly united with Christ the Priest, make profession in the Order in due time.
- §2 By this act, which proceeds from a lively faith and a deeper consciousness of their baptism and ordination, they promise to make their lifestyle subject to a special rule of perfection and become sons of Saint Dominic.
- §3 Conscious of their profession, they should strive with all their strength to live in the spirit of the evangelical counsels and beatitudes, so that they can cooperate ever more perfectly with the grace they received through the imposition of hands.
- §4 Moreover, those who, motivated by a desire for a greater consecration of themselves, want to practice the evangelical counsels through the three vows, can make these vows freely and privately.

### **Profession in the Order of Saint Dominic**

- 5 §1 Profession in the Order of Saint Dominic calls for a more profound spirit of *poverty*, so that, as priests living in the world and appreciating “human values and created goods as gifts from God,”<sup>12</sup> they may yet know how to use them with discretion and as they are properly related to the pastoral aims of their ministry, and hence arrive at the point “of embracing voluntary poverty, whereby they are more clearly conformed to Christ and may become more devoted to the sacred ministry”<sup>13</sup>
- §2 Profession in the Order of Saint Dominic places them in a better condition to understand and to live faithfully the sublime grace of *celibacy*, which “is both a sign of and an incentive to pastoral charity and a very special source of Spiritual fruitfulness on earth”<sup>14</sup>, as well as a living argument for that future life which they preach.
- §3 Profession in the Order of Saint Dominic helps them also to become fully conscious of their hierarchical communion with the Bishop and the Pope, which perfects in their hearts true *obedience*, whereby “they revere in them the authority of Christ the

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<sup>9</sup> Vatican Council II, *Presbyterium ordinis* Decree on the Ministry and Life of Presbyters, no. 6.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, no. 3.

<sup>e</sup> Phil. 4:8.

<sup>f</sup> Rom 12:15.

<sup>11</sup> Jordan of Saxony *Book on the Beginnings of the Order of Preachers*, no. 107.

<sup>12</sup> Vatican Council II, *Presbyterium ordinis* Decree on the Ministry and Life of Presbyters, no. 17.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, no. 17.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, no. 16.

Supreme Pastor.” This obedience is a gift for the service of the Church and a sincere submission to her Magisterium<sup>15</sup>

### **The Sources of Sanctification**

6. The chief sources from which the presbyters of Saint Dominic draw increase and progress in contemplation and the apostolic spirit are:

- §1 The sacred functions which they fulfill every day in their pastoral ministry, inasmuch as they carry out these functions properly and ever more fervently in communion with the Bishop and other priests<sup>16</sup> and the whole Order of Saint Dominic, of which they have become members.
- §2 The Word of God as inwardly received with faith through private and public reading of the Sacred Scriptures. Through this they become disciples of the Divine Master and of God’s Wisdom and better prepared for preaching in the power of God<sup>17</sup>.
- §3 Daily and worthy celebration of the Sacrifice of the Mass, which, offered in the person of Christ, associates them in a special way with the mystery of the Lord’s death and impels them to mortify in themselves the works of the flesh and to sacrifice themselves for the flock committed to their care<sup>18</sup>.
- §4 Daily and devout recitation of the Liturgy of the Hours, which unites them with the sublime prayer of Christ and of the Church for the world.<sup>19</sup> Priests of Saint Dominic receive the faculty to use the Dominican Calendar so that, in union with the whole Order, they can more perfectly offer the prayers of the Church and have a fuller share in the graces and merits of the Order.
- §5 There must be daily dialogue with Christ in keeping with the example and in imitation of Holy Father Dominic, about whom we read that “he always spoke with God or about God”<sup>20</sup>, and that “during the hours of the night no one was more constant than he in vigils and prayers of all types: and that “very often it was his practice to spend the whole night in church...Hence he used to pray especially at night and persevered in vigils.”<sup>21</sup> They should be faithful in taking time for daily meditation and a spiritual retreat at least once a month.<sup>22</sup>
- §6 The frequent and fruitful reception of the sacrament of Penance for conversion of heart, along with a daily examination of conscience; “and they should highly esteem spiritual direction”<sup>23</sup>
- §7 The study of the Holy Bible, the Holy Fathers, the documents of the magisterium of the Holy Church, and sacred theology, especially that which has been so clearly and profoundly explained by Saint Thomas Aquinas.
- §8 Devotion towards the Virgin Mother of God, which in our Order has special expression in the Holy Rosary, understood as contemplation with Mary of the mystery of salvation, namely, Christ’s life, death, and resurrection. The priests of Saint Dominic should always be faithful to this humble, wise, and sublime type of prayer.

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., no. 7

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., no. 13.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., no. 13; 2 Cor. 4:7.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., nos. 13 and 14; 1 John 16.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., no. 13.

<sup>20</sup> Acts of the Canonization of Saint Dominic, Process held at Bologna, no. 13.

<sup>21</sup> Jordan of Saxony, Book on the Beginnings of the Order of Preachers, nos. 105-106.

<sup>22</sup> Vatican Council II, *Presbyterium Ordinis* Decree on the Ministry and Life of Presbyters, no. 18.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., no. 17.

§9 Special devotion towards our holy Father Dominic and earnest imitation of his outstanding example in holiness of life, apostolic spirit, and zeal for the salvation of souls; of his fervor in prayer, contemplation, mental recollection, silence, and continuous union with God. Special devotion towards Saint Catherine of Siena, renowned daughter of the Order, faithful servant and doctor of Holy Church, as well as the heavenly patroness and protectress of the Lay and Priestly Fraternities of our Order in this world.

Devotion towards all the saints and blessed of the Order, as well as imitation of their example.

### **Ecclesial and Community Life**

7. By keeping their universal mission always in mind, “let priests remember that they must have at heart the care of all the churches.” Hence, in union with their bishop, they should be ready at all times to work wherever a greater pastoral need demands this.<sup>24</sup>

8. In an ever growing communion with their bishop, priests should attentively follow him with a constant affection, share with him the anxieties and joys of the apostolic work, and generously and faithfully cooperate with him.<sup>25</sup> Especially in this, the example of Saint Dominic should illumine our priests, for our holy patriarch nourished in his heart throughout his whole apostolic life an affection of special veneration towards the sacred hierarchy.

9. §1 Because of their unity in sacred ordination and the mission in the Church, all priests “should be bound to each other by an intimate sacramental brotherhood” and form a single presbyterium under their own bishop<sup>26</sup> Then all, whether diocesan or religious, as brothers in the priesthood should embrace one another by a sincere love and help each other both through prayer and through apostolic collaboration, so “as to be fellow workers on behalf of truth.”<sup>27</sup>

§2 Priests however, who profess the rule of Saint Dominic together, even if they do not live in a religious community, should not forget that they constitute a part of the Dominican Family and belong to a special brotherhood. This brotherhood should always be a living reality and should manifest itself in some regular common gathering. Sometimes, too, they should come together with their Dominican brethren who will gladly and joyfully receive them into their convents and houses, so that these priests may become sharers of the graces and blessings of the Order in a visible way.

10. §1 The priests of this brotherhood should also have frequent and cordial relations with our Lay Fraternities, united with them in that common priesthood which is based upon Baptism. “They should recognize the dignity of the laity and that role which is proper to them in the mission of the Church;”<sup>28</sup> they should gladly listen to the opinions and aspirations of the laity in order to have a better understanding of the signs of the times.

Furthermore, they should prudently assign to the laity offices of trust for the good of the Church and should strive to maintain peace and concord with all.

Nevertheless, they should not cease to exercise their own specific office over the laity, namely, that of leader and teacher. In fact, they should be “defenders and vigorous proclaimers of the truth, lest the faithful be ‘carried along by every wind of

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid., no. 10.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., no. 7.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., no. 8.

<sup>27</sup> 3 John 8.

<sup>28</sup> Vatican Council II, *Presbyterium ordinis* Decree on the Ministry and Life of Presbyters, no. 9.

doctrine”<sup>29</sup> Our Holy Father Dominic and the Order which he founded has given us an admirable example of “defender and proclaimer of the truth.”

- §2 To the extent that this is possible, priests forming a part of the Dominican Family should also be animators and guides of our Lay Fraternities; they should instruct and lead them along the path of perfection, and draw them to Christ by word and example. However, they should allow the laity that just autonomy which is theirs and is granted to them according to their statutes.

## **II THE STRUCTURE AND GOVERNANCE OF PRIESTS’ FRATERNITIES**

### *Admission and Profession*

11. For admission into the priests’ fraternity of Saint Dominic, there is required a favorable vote of the majority of the fraternity council.
12. §1 Priests are received into the Order by a special sacred rite (vestition). The novitiate begins with this rite and normally lasts for one year, unless the superior of the Order grants a dispensation in this regard for some reasonable cause.
- §2 This preparatory period is needed to know and understand the spirit of the Order of Saint Dominic. Once this period is completed, and the previous consent of a majority of the fraternity council has been obtained, these priests are admitted to profession.
- §3 The novitiate cannot be validly extended beyond two years.
13. §1 By virtue of this profession, accepted and ratified by the Order in the name of the Church, the priests become fully and definitively members of the Dominican Family, and enjoy its spiritual benefits.
- §2 The following formula is used in making profession: “To the honor of Almighty God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, of Blessed Mary, ever-Virgin, and Holy Father Dominic, I, *N.N.*, in the presence of you, Brother \_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_, in place of the Master of the Order of Friars Preachers, make profession and promise that I will live according to the Rule of the Priestly Fraternities of Saint Dominic until death.
14. According to the judgment of a major superior of the Order, in particular circumstances, certain priests can be admitted individually, that is, outside a local fraternity, and their names should be recorded in a special register.

### *Fraternities and their Governance*

15. §1 Priests of Saint Dominic in particular places are normally organized into local fraternities, according to various cities, vicariates deaneries or dioceses, and they are also to have periodic meetings.
- §2 The consent of the local ordinary is needed for erecting a local fraternity.
- §3 It is strongly advised that in every religious province, priests received into the Order by an individual title (no. 14) should be associated in a special fraternity and should meet at least once a year.
16. §1 Priestly fraternities of Saint Dominic are united with the Order. In their progress in Dominican life, they rely upon the major superiors of the Order, that is, the Prior Provincial of the territory where the fraternities are established and the Master of the Order, head of the whole Dominican Family and successor to Saint Dominic.

However, the Master of the Order ordinarily provides for all fraternities through his General Promoter, and the Prior Provincial through his Provincial Promoter, who

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid., no. 9; Eph 4:14.

regularly visits these fraternities at appropriate times and promotes the spirit of Dominican life in them.

- §2 The superiors of the Order or their delegates are the ordinary ministers of the rite of vestition and profession.
17. §1 Each fraternity is internally directed by the Prior with his council.
- §2 The Prior calls meetings of the council and of the fraternity and presides over them, maintains contact with the superiors of the Order, assists the members of the fraternity in their spiritual progress and is solicitous of fidelity to the professed rule.
18. §1 The aforementioned council is elected for three years by a majority vote of the priests of the fraternity who have made their profession.
- §2 The councilors selected in this way then elect a Prior from their group likewise by a majority vote. This election should be confirmed by the Prior Provincial, after he listens to the advice of the Provincial Promoter.
- §3 The Prior with his council determines the number of councilors, as well as the frequency of meetings, the manner in which these meetings should be conducted, the time, frequency, and duration of retreats, suffrages for deceased brethren, and all those matters pertinent to the life and progress of the fraternity which are not particularly determined in the present rule. The opinion of the Provincial Promoter must always be heard in all these matters.
19. §1 In a religious province where there are several priests' fraternities, the Prior Provincial, after listening to the advice of his Promoter, can name a priest who would be responsible for all these fraternities. If, however, this is not possible for any reason, the Provincial Promoter himself shall personally provide this care.
- §2 The Prior Provincial together with his Promoter should care for the fraternities within the province, promote the progress and growth of all priests' fraternities, have effective contact with the Provincial President of the Lay Fraternities and also take part in the meetings of the Provincial Council of the Laity along with their Provincial Promoter and President. In this way he encourages fraternal collaboration between the Priests and the Laity of Saint Dominic.
- §3 What is said here about the provincial sphere is analogously valid and can be extended to national and international fraternity councils.
20. §1 That the priests of Saint Dominic may embrace their own obligations "not as slaves under the law, but as free men under grace"<sup>30</sup>, it is defined that individual transgressions of the rule do not constitute moral fault.
- §2 Superiors of fraternities who belong to the Order can lawfully dispense from each prescription of the rule, either temporarily or habitually, if they judge this to be right in the Lord.
- §3 The Prior Provincial has the power to convalidate invalidly placed acts of fraternities especially concerning admission and profession.

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<sup>30</sup> Rule of Saint Augustine.