



Collaboration: A Strategy for Transformation
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I feel both honored and privileged to be with you today as you gather together in hope – of new sight, of deepened understanding of your shared mission, open to the challenge of new possibilities of working together for the sake of the Kingdom. You have been called to steward God’s gift of religious life to the church at a very challenging moment. On the one hand it is a moment of death, decline and diminishment. Only 3.5% of 106,000 American religious are under 45. And yet we speak of new paradigms and the transformation of consciousness; we speak of prophetic witness and possibilities of partnership. We seem to be both hard headed realists and incorrigible dreamers. But religious life exists for the sake of mission – to a Church and a world desperately in need of transformation, of healing, hungry for hope, justice and peace. The world and the Church are groaning, in need of transformation.

The stewardship entrusted to you as religious leaders not only involves the ongoing renewal of religious life within the Church but also involves the healing and reconciliation of our broken, wounded, violent world. At its best moments religious life has had a prophetic role in the Church: the rise of monasticism in the fifth century, the emergence of the mendicant orders in the thirteenth century, the active congregations of women and men in the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries – phenomena brought forth by the Spirit at critical moments in history. Each of these moments created a new future for the Church as it struggled to be faithful to the dream of God urging from within.

I have been invited to be with you today because of my 40 years’ experience in discovering, preaching, and living the Gospel of collaboration within the Dominican Order. I do have a story to tell, and I hope it will stimulate your imagination and engender hope for the work entrusted to you as the leaders of religious men and women in the United States. I will focus on my experience, not because it is normative but because my story might stimulate your imaginations about both the past and the future.

In the early 70’s a small band of Dominicans located on the banks of the Mississippi in Dubuque and Sinsinawa had a prophetic intuition that collaboration of the men and women of the Order of Preachers was the transformative energy at the heart of renewal. This vision had emerged from new experiences of friars and sisters studying theology together, working together on formation programs, sharing retreat ministry, engaging in scholarly projects and think tanks - all of which were gradually shaping new ways of relating in equality and mutuality. One day in 1969 the Sinsinawa leadership invited Kevin O’Rourke, Tom O’Meara, and George Doherty to join us for a conversation about authority and obedience. No one had a prepared paper; just brothers and sisters reflecting together on

the heart of the matter. We had new questions to explore together. The world seemed young then, and everything was possible.

This emergent intuition led to the founding of the Parable Conference for Dominican Life and Mission by the Sinsinawa Dominicans and the Central Province of Dominican men to promote collaboration in spirituality, ministry, research, and publications. The Province gave \$5000 and a Chevy Impala with 80,000 miles on it, and Sinsinawa gave \$5000 and me. (Yes, we often pondered who gave more.) In a few short years Parable became a floating national network of retreat teams and committees engaged in collaboration at a variety of levels. Out of this ferment came the national inter-novitiate program for Dominican novices – men and women; a new retreat model shaped by a renewed understanding of Dominican spirituality articulated from the experience of women as well as men; annual conferences on ministry, spirituality, justice, and the arts; publication of new translations of Dominican sources in collaboration with the English Dominican Simon Tugwell; the collaborative canonical novitiate for Dominican women and the OPUS project committed to writing the history of Dominicans in the United States - to name but a few fruits of that mustard seed of collaboration. As we gathered Dominicans together to dream and to plan, to form new kinds of partnerships and design new experiences, it seemed as though the Lord was saying: “Diane, get the folks together; I’ll take care of the rest.”

The grace that we were experiencing as American Dominicans was articulated in 1977 in the General Chapter of the Order at Quezon City in the Philippines.

Now is the acceptable time for the Dominican Family to achieve true equality and complementarity among its different branches. If we believe that the Holy Spirit truly speaks to us in and through the signs of the times – the emergence of the laity and the liberation of women and the recognition of their equality with men – we cannot ignore this call to develop among all branches of the Order a greater collaboration in all our ministries, and we cannot neglect to undertake efforts to study and promote organic unity between these branches. What lies before us at this time is a challenge to become what St. Dominic had begun: a family joined in unity of life and complementarity of service to the Church and the world.

In other words we were returning to the charism of the founder in a new context. The Spirit of God was at work among us effecting a transformation from the heart of our charism.

When I began preaching the gospel of collaboration I did a great deal of research on gender differences in relationships and communication, and many of my presentations were geared to helping women and men understand one another better. I talked a lot about how we are socialized into gender roles –men marked by autonomy, separateness, and self-reliance, women socialized into attachment, affiliation, connection. I talked about issues of intimacy and empathy and power, about patriarchy and authority, and how we were being called to move from clericalism, anti-clericalism and sexism to equality, mutuality and interdependence. Thirty years later I think we have all been run through that car wash many times over now, and we know that the transformation of relationships and gender roles is a lifelong project for each of us within the context of an ongoing cultural and ecclesial earthquake. Knowledge about and understanding of sexual differentiation remain a challenge –demanding layers of knowledge from psychology, sociology, anthropology, theology, philosophy, gender studies – and yet it will still not be an exact science. As men and women how are we different? How are we the same? And what are the factors that make us both different and the same as human persons?

In the first decade of preaching the gospel of collaboration I think the conventional wisdom was that men had to do most of the changing – making room for women who had been relegated to secondary

roles, learning to see women as equals, paying attention in the conversation to women's contributions, shaping relationships of mutuality. But women had to make their own attitudinal changes – letting go of a partly unconscious anti-clericalism as they awakened to a new sense of personhood and moving out of behavioral patterns that fostered the subordination of women. For example, studies showed in conversations patterns between men and women, women were expert in offering the questions to the man to get him talking about himself, his work, his interest, his experience. Women could keep the conversation going through an entire dinner party with the effect that the man thought his experience was incredibly fascinating. Few men ever turned the questions around to engage the woman's experience and interest; somehow the mutuality chip was often missing. Once women discovered that they were prey to this conversational booby trap– and it was a highly developed art in sisters talking with priests – they suddenly realized it was not only exhausting but boring. And we no longer felt responsible for making sure the conversation didn't lag if it was not a potentially mutual exchange.

Certain unique factors in our Dominican culture readied us for working together with equality, mutuality, and collegiality. Dominican priests and sisters had a history of traditional relationship wherein the men served as chaplains, gave the sisters' retreat, taught theology to postulants and novices; the women hired the men to teach theology and philosophy in their colleges and high schools. Roles were defined and familial bonds established – along with sibling rivalries and family feuds. Like all family histories our history was an obstacle as well as an opportunity.

But in the 1970s the province and congregation had committed themselves to building new kinds of partnership between the brothers and sisters in scholarship, spirituality and ministry. Such a project demanded the design of new experiences and projects for bringing the men and women together in new ways, and a new vision of collaboration as a Dominican Family “on mission.” In this new moment women assumed new roles as team leaders, preachers, and retreat directors, and both women and men were learning new, more mutual ways of relating to one another as co-ministers.

Charlie Bouchard and I had both been both formed by this intentional collaboration in the Order when he invited me to serve as dean at Aquinas Institute of Theology. He was a 38 year old President of Aquinas. Charlie had entered the Order just as the transformative praxis began to be articulated and the Parable conference was founded. He and his fellow novices were acculturated into a family of men and women, brothers and sisters of the Order of Preachers.

Although we came very green to the project of shared leadership in theological education, we shared a vision and an innate conviction that we were peers and would meet on level ground. And that we were breaking new ground in the Order and in the Church. For me it was a natural development from my history with Aquinas as both student and adjunct faculty and from my work promoting collaboration. Now I had a chance to not only talk about it and design short term projects but to live it 24/7 within an institution with a faculty of nine women and nine men.

Both of us had been shaped by the Dominican tradition of collegiality and democratic government. Charlie understood that the school had to shift into a new mode if it was to survive; he brought to the challenge willingness to risk, the ability to think programmatically, the strong academic instincts of a scholarly teacher, and high energy. I brought experience in administration and governance, a love of Aquinas Institute, a willingness to ask the critical questions, a belief in the value of process and thinking together, and a confidence that the Order was in process of transformation of relationships for the sake of mission – that we were writing a new chapter with our lives, in effect doing a new deed.

As a woman I know I am more attentive to relationships and to the demands of redefining and truth-telling. I think I have an obsessive need for clarification, and it is a burden to all parties involved. But I

am fully convinced of Parker Palmer's assertion that "if people skimp on their inner work their outer work suffers as well." We each have our shadow side, and when we work together in genuine partnership we come to know both the light and the dark of ourselves and of one another. If we fail to do our inner work when we are relating within equality and mutuality in a sustained daily way, our shadow side, the monsters deep within, can be released to disturb our peace in ways we don't immediately understand. If the partnership is to survive this threshold of tension, attention must be paid to the task of inner work. And it may well be that the partnership cannot survive. It may well be that what worked in the past can no longer work because of the complexities of both context and personalities.

As leaders of a theological faculty we had lived our way into relationships of equality, mutuality, and interdependence – learning from one another, shedding our stereotypic views of the other. And coming to value one another in new ways because the whole was so much greater than the sum of the parts. We now functioned in a world where the women shared the preaching, women served in roles of authority at a seminary, and men were learning that the process was as important as the outcome.

Timothy Radcliffe, the former Master of the Order, summed up where men and women find themselves today rather neatly:

How can equality be related to difference? We are at the very beginning of understanding what is the significance of our sexual differentiation, and it is hard to have intelligent discussions of the role of men and women in the church without this. We have seen our tradition often equate difference with the subordination of women. Then we saw a period where equality was so conceived so to almost seek to eliminate difference. Now we need to move to the third stage of celebrating difference in union.

This sense of stages or variant attitudes toward the differences between men and women is reflected in the 2004 Letter from the Sacred Congregation on Collaboration of Men and Women in the Church. The letter is not really about collaboration but is an attempt to respond to currents of contemporary thought that in the Vatican's view blur differences between men and women and regard women as adversaries of men. Adequate critique of the document cannot be done in this moment, but suffice to say the document tends to assert the complementarity of two distinct human natures, but only the female side is defined: marked by an attitude of receptivity, faithfulness, listening, waiting, faithfulness, and praise. (We must note that complementarity has historically been used to support women in subordinate roles.) According to the document women seem to be specialists in "being for others" by their very nature, while males – who also as humans persons are called to be for others – apparently have to learn how to do it through women's example. Ed Vacek, SJ, has written of the letter: "Given the Church's high estimation of women's God-given natural abilities in morality and spirituality, a neutral observer might be tempted to say that priesthood should be reserved for them."

We are gathered in this room with all our human differences: biological, sexual, psychological, spiritual, intellectual, each of us a unique embodiment of what it means to be human. And we have all been to enough meetings together to know that some women and some men often approach things differently, and that we have had to widen the pegs of our tents to understand one another and to serve the coming of a new heaven and a new earth. I looked at a study of the LCWR and CMSM web sites done by Mary Johnson. The men's mission statement was a paragraph; the women's was two pages. (Because it included the vision statement as well.) We all know that some of us love process and others keep yearning to arrive at the product. We know that women seem more ready to verbalize and explore feelings, in contrast to the man who came home and said to his wife: "I had a terrible day." She said "Would you like to talk about it?" "I just did," he said. Deborah Tannen's *You Just Don't*

Understand Me and more recent books are truly helpful in naming and exploring these linguistic differences.

The difference I want to focus on today is the difference of the renewal journey for religious communities of men and religious communities of women. I believe the journey of renewed religious life has been significantly different for men and women – in models of authority, decision-making, and diversification of ministries. For women transformation of lifestyle symbolized in the change of habit was radical. Both women and men wore habits, but men had the option of black suits, collars, black ties, golf shirts and swim trunks. Women were fully habited every waking hour– some of us never had recreational attire even in the convent. (A few summers ago I saw some young Amish women in their blacks and grays in a discount store studying flowered robes and brightly colored slippers. I wondered if I should warn them they were on the edge of a slippery slope.) Thus our gradual emergence from the habit and claiming of our feminine identity had a significance unknown to religious men. Religious women came to a new sense of self as whole persons within the cultural upheaval of the sixties.

But even more radical was the experimentation with models of authority. As Dominican sisters we were and are members of an Order democratic from the beginning. The men of the Order elected their leaders both locally and provincially- for the past eight centuries. Dominican friars can elect their local prior from the membership of the province to be approved by the Provincial. Until Vatican II Dominican sisters – because they were women – did not elect local prioresses but rather lived “under” appointed superiors. The new appropriation of the fullness of the democratic tradition of the Order of Preachers combined with the awakening of the women’s movement and a reaction against any form of domination real or imagined. We moved rapidly to collegial authority, consensus decision making, and at the same time moved out of institutional ministries for more direct service with the poor and into a variety of justice ministries. In all the years we sisters were transforming and dismantling our structures of authority and increasing participation in decision making, creating collegial communities of shared responsibility and changing the leader’s role to coordinator, I found no parallel in my Dominican brothers’ experience. I never heard my Dominican brothers questioning the necessity of a prior or the role of authority. They were moving into smaller communities and adapting their horaria and lifestyles, but elected priors were a permanent piece of community life. By way of contrast, despite an 800 year democratic tradition of local authority and over thirty years of experimentations with local government, my community’s 2006 General Chapter legislated six more years of experimentation with local governance, and the value and role of local authority remains warmly debated. Recall the Nygren-Ukaritis study: For men the easiest vow was obedience; the hardest celibacy; for women the most meaningful vow was celibacy, the hardest obedience.

My Dominican brothers have assemblies of the whole membership and chapters with elected delegates. My congregation had a chapter of 450 women. But I confess I do not see us moving ahead with a renewed sense of mission out of that experience. I see us truly loving one another and settling for “non-binding resolutions.” The search for new models of authority and fuller participation in decision-making was assuredly rooted in the women’s movement, in women assuming personal authority and awakening to their full personhood, beyond the roles and boundaries that society and the Church had set down for them. But we have paid a price.

After Vatican II American sisters had the spirit, organization and education to respond quickly to the call to renewal, and they did so in the midst of the civil rights movement, feminist movement, and the sexual revolution. They reacted against patriarchy, oppression of women, and all forms of discrimination. In this awakening the LCWR was a place where women leaders could talk to one another. Lora Ann Quinonez and Mary Daniel Turner in their book *Transformation of American*

Catholic Sisters wrote eloquently of the role of the LCWR in the re-imagining of religious life for women:

It was the LCWR that brought sisters face to face with religious life as an institution in the church, with generalized concepts of religious life, with a common awareness of a poor fit between formal church teaching on religious life and the flesh and blood of American sisters. It was the Conference that provided an arena and tools for a collective orientation toward the renewal mandated by Vatican II. It was in the Conference that religious leaders began to risk voicing their anxieties about Vatican reactions to American developments. It was to the Conference that the women increasingly looked for the education, research, and reflection needed for a new formulation of religious identity. The Conference in short was where women learned to talk to one another. And that quite literally gave birth to new women. (p. 164)

As I prepared for this talk I thought of Theresa Kane and that double-edged moment in the Shrine of the Immaculate Conception when she spoke directly to John Paul II about opening the ministries of the church to women. A few months after the event I was in Washington for a meeting and visited a friend at the apostolic delegation. He toured me through the rooms, and we stood in the dining room where John Paul had dinner with government and church dignitaries. He pointed to the place where he had sat, next to Brezinski's 12 year old son. I thought to myself: A twelve year old boy had a privilege not given to the President or the Executive committee of the LCWR. Had there even been a coffee for the Executive Committee with the Holy Father, would Theresa Kane have had to challenge the pope publicly?

This awakening opened a horizon of new ministry beyond the familiar schools and hospitals and social work; sisters left institutional ministries for new ministry initiatives, more direct service of the poor, for justice and peace ministries, and moved into new professions like law and medicine. Thus diversification of ministries distinguishes the contemporary history of American religious women. But in the present moment I see an emerging trend in which sisters are re-examining how they are living out their congregational mission and are looking once again at the call to mission in their congregational institutional ministries.

Men's communities were a more permanent part of the diocesan infrastructure of parishes and other institutions and tended to be part of the "official church." I believe the institution of priesthood and the centrality of sacramental life in the Catholic experience give you that essential role –but also because you are men you have had the historical advantage. But like your sisters, you have known loss and aging and lack of vocations. But the greatest suffering has been the sexual abuse crisis. None of you are unscathed. While it has touched some women's communities, it is not the devastating reality it has been for men's communities. And although I dare to assert that you have a more secure place within the institutional Church, I know that many of you, if not all, are experiencing the centuries-old tension between the religious orders and the episcopacy (at the Lateran council that approved the Order of Preachers, the assembly was made up of 800 abbots and 400 bishops – a different kind of balance) – the tension between the charismatic and institutional elements of the Church. Assuredly the sexual abuse crisis has heightened that ancient tension between episcopal power and religious authority. I personally could name three major dioceses where the local ordinary has recently bullied and challenged the authority of a provincial and claimed absolute power.

These two journeys diverged from one another soon after the first decade of renewal, and I think men and women ended up on different planets – maybe not Mars and Venus, but assuredly seeing ministry and prophetic identity and relationship to the hierarchical Church differently. Women were immersed in drafting their Constitutions and getting them approved by Rome; the ordination issue rose and fell

like a North Korean rocket; commitment to the work of justice and the building of peace was our prophetic edge.

Since Vatican II we have grown comfortable talking about new levels of consciousness, paradigm shifts, and prophetic witness in the Church. Having risked saying that, I dare to say that I am convinced that as religious men and women, stewards entrusted with the renewal of the Church, we are called to be prophetic agents of a new Church being born under the pressure of the Spirit –but together not separately. And I see two critical areas where religious leadership can lead the church to a new future: 1) men and women working together; and 2) collegial authority that promotes shared responsibility

When I began preaching the gospel of collaboration in the 70s, the term collaboration was not even in the Catholic Periodical Index. When I pursued articles on ministry I would find the term occasionally embedded in the articles. But the best writing I found in the late 70s and early 80s and since then was in bishops' pastoral letters in the letters of Bishop Hubbard of Albany, Bishop Murphy of Baltimore, Archbishop Borders, Cardinal Mahoney. Bishop Murphy of Baltimore wrote: "Collaboration is more than working together or acting jointly; it is a mindset or a way of life. It requires the conviction that one's work and one's thought and even one's life will be enhanced by claiming the blessings that come only by way of the perspectives and efforts of other people." In the same talk he says further: "The fact that men and women as ministers do not know how to relate to each other has a great deal to do with the failure of the church to fully understand and practice collaboration. To become more faithful to our mission as a collaborating church we must effect reconciliation in three areas: (1) our understanding of priesthood and ministry; (2) our understanding of the role of women in the church; and (3) our understanding of the relationship of celibacy and ministry."

In 1988 Archbishop Borders of Baltimore issued a pastoral letter *You Are a Royal Priesthood* affirming the baptismal vocation to holiness and ministry given to each of us. He writes:

Collaboration is of the very essence of the church's ministry. For by collaboration, I simply mean lay people, ordained ministers and religious working together in mutual trust and support and in mutual dedication to a common goal. Such collaboration is of the essence of the church's life and mission because it is a way of calling upon everyone to be responsible for developing oneself and one's gifts and placing them at the service of the community.

Cardinal Mahony has written:

Ministry in the new millennium will be more collaborative and more inclusive in its exercise. The body is endowed with many gifts. Authentic collaboration is rooted in the conviction that all of the baptized are given a share in Christ's priestly ministry, and that one and all are necessary for the fulfillment of the church's mission. True collaboration requires an appreciation of the distinction and differentiation of roles and responsibilities in the body of Christ, together with a clear recognition of the fundamental equality of all the baptized, ordained and non-ordained. For effective collaboration to occur, each one must believe that he or she has something to offer and have trust in the gifts that others bring to our common task. Above all, we must be willing to admit that we can achieve something together that we cannot achieve alone.

May I dare to say these letters are the Spirit-inspired, official voice of the Church?

I think Archbishop Murphy of Baltimore was right when he said 30 years ago that men and women in the Church do not know how to relate to one another. But as men and women of religious communities – in many traditions sharing founders and charisms – I think we should have an edge on relating to one another. In the recent issue of *Kindling*, the publication from the Center for the Study of Religious Life – which you sponsor – the banner at the top of each article read: The Benedictine Family; the Franciscan Family, the Passionist Family, the Maryknoll Family, the Daughters of the Holy Spirit Family, the Dominican Family. We understand ourselves as members of religious families. We also know that in families there are sibling rivalries and ancient conflicts; in a family conflict is allowed but not disloyalty. We are family, for better or worse. We tend to meet first as cousins, and then if all goes well we become brothers and sisters. Because of this family bond we have a human experience of the bond of grace not blood, of what it means to be one in Christ. But no matter what our tradition we are the vowed religious of the Church and together we can show forth the potential of men and women sharing their gifts, living into new ways of relating and thus energize collaboration with the laity as brothers and sisters of one another.

Collaboration is grounded in a theology of gifts, a theology of abundance not scarcity. A brilliant young lay woman theologian, Ann Garrido, has written: “Collaboration begins with the conviction that God is not frugal or stingy with people but gifts every one of them. The gifts are meant to be used on behalf of the Kingdom. A definition of collaboration might be discernment and full actualization of the different gifts that people have been given for the sake of the Kingdom.” She says further that “collaboration has a dual nature: between human and God and between humans for God....the church is a gift of God; Assembly required.”

Our distinct journeys in the past have made us see one another as “other” – different, not the same. But we have come to a new moment with new sight – even if we first see “trees walking,” we see the possibility of partnership. The issue of women and men as partners in the Christian community has become a turning point of decision and direction.

We are all challenged to a deeper conversion in a more authentic way of life. The issues that face us in today’s church are deeper than our need to confront destructive forms of patriarchy. The gospel and the current teaching of the church both challenge us to come to grips with oppression and elitism wherever it is encountered. In the end we are challenged to move beyond sexism to mutuality, beyond division to unity, beyond bitterness to reconciliation, beyond competition to collaboration. We are called, in short, to journey toward partnership.

Religious men and women are called to community, to democratic, participative governance and collegial authority. In many dioceses and parishes there is disaffection, alienation, distrust and discouragement because of the failure of authority in the sexual abuse crisis. Many people have lost hope; many people are deeply angry because they don’t see that things have changed. We know some are blind to much that has changed, but I think they cannot see because the hierarchical model of authority still looks the same. In that model the style, participation, openness to the broader community is totally dependent upon the person who holds the authority. It can be autocratic and absolute, or it can be collaborative, welcoming and honoring the gifts and contributions of the community.

I believe religious men and women’s communities have a significant contribution to make to the renewal of authority and collegiality among the community of faith. We elect our leaders from our midst; our leaders share power and responsibility; our leaders govern according to constitutions and legislative chapters. We know that the grace is in the gathering, that listening – and hearing – is critical

to openness to God's Spirit. And we know that we are called to discern, cherish, and nurture the gifts entrusted to the community by the Spirit of God.

Again, Bishop Murphy: "The vision and practice of partnership between women and men is at the heart of the church's renewal. The lack of mutuality between women and men is blunting the church's task of evangelization. The lack of partnership has called into question the credibility of the church's teaching in international justice and peace. The lack of partnership has contributed significantly to the present crisis of vocational and ministerial resources. The issue of women and men working together is there beneath the surface of our societal and cultural and global divisions."

We are called into partnership and to model together with the laity the transformative potential of collaboration grounded in a theology of gifts. "To each individual the manifestation of the Spirit is given for some benefit...but one and the same Spirit produces all of these, distributing them individually to each person." It is time for us to understand together what "difference in union" means for contemporary men and women and to move together into new sight and new abundance, trusting that in our midst is the transformative power of the God of abundance not scarcity.

I love the line from the poet Rilke: "The future enters into us in order to transform itself long before it happens." The future of God's grace is at work within you, urging you to new sight, summoning you to new openness and understanding of one another, creating from within your lives a transformed future. It is a weighty, holy burden that you share.