

Laudare

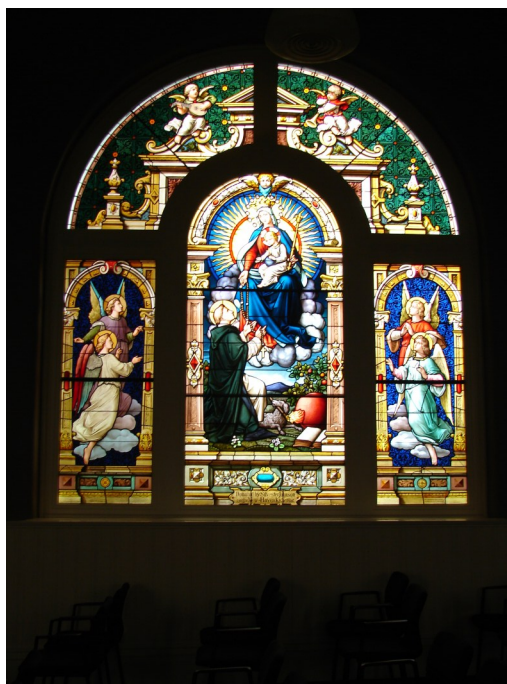
SPECIAL SUMMER EDITION

"...did not our hearts burn within us?"

Sr. Paula Marie Koffi is originally from the Ivory Coast. Her grandmother was a convert to Catholicism. She characterizes her family as devout Catholics. There were two monasteries in her home town; one of them Benedictine. Her mother is a Lay Benedictine. After coming to America, she attended college in Bowling Green, Kentucky, where she studied accounting. She became associated with a Catholic Campus Group where she had the opportunity to hear a Dominican Friar from the House of Studies in Washington, D.C. This was her first exposure to the Dominican Order. She became interested in Religious Orders, and began an internet search. Things began to change in her life: the music she listened to and the movies she watched. She made a visit to the Motherhouse....and the rest is history!

Sr. Marie Dominique Mullen was a nun. She attended Christendom and became aware of a "possible vocation." She attended a retreat at the Motherhouse and felt the glow. She was said to "have the glow." She later returned for a Vocation Retreat. She shared her discernment with her mother who told her about John Cardinal Newman and his response of faith. It was then that she knew what God wanted her to do. After writing her *Letter of Intent*, she felt a peace.

Sr. Felicity Hendershott sometimes knew she would be a nun. She corresponded with the cloistered sisters "at EWTN." She figured she would "become a nun, pray all her life, die, and then go to Heaven." End of story! However, she had "all the desires of a young heart." Her brother was also discerning if he had a call to Holy Orders. They "played it safe": he kept to his male friends; however she kept to her female friends; however they would party together! Her discernment led her to the Dominican Sisters at Nashville. She entered the Motherhouse and since then has been discovering "the incredible depths of His love." All the desires of her young heart have been met.



military "brat" who grew up in Germany. She attended Christendom College where she became increasingly aware of a "possible vocation." During her sophomore year, she made a retreat at the Motherhouse and felt the glow. She was said to "have the glow." She later returned for a Vocation Retreat. She shared her discernment with her mother who told her about John Cardinal Newman and his response of faith. It was then that she knew what God wanted her to do. After writing her *Letter of Intent*, she felt a peace.

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Together, they talk about "the vibrancy of the Liturgy," and being more concerned with who they are before God, and what it is God wants them to do for others. The journey has been difficult: leaving friends and family, getting up at 5 AM, focusing on what they will "give" as opposed to what they will get, and understanding how obedience to the little things in one's day is just as important as the so-called bigger demands in our life. Religious life has entailed a changing dynamic in their relationships, the meaning of trust, and allowing their Catholic faith to come alive in their lives.

We listened intently. We heard the voices of courage. We felt the warmth and love they were living. We saw their joy. Our hearts burned within us. We knew that Jesus was close by.



Sr. Paula Marie

“Obedience is a participation in the very wisdom of God....Formation itself is an obedience....Everything in my life changed: the music I listened to, the movies I watched.” For Sr. Paula Marie a deeply moving “spiritual moment” was to experience community life among the other sisters.

“The shadows of our life pose important questions....some make crippling decisions....I was trying to be someone I am not....I wanted to be the person God wanted me to be....My college studies became an integration of my faith into every aspect of my life....We must surrender to the small things in our life.....Someone said I “had the glow”....”



Sr. Marie Dominique



Sr. Felicity

“I went to confession and told the priest I wanted to be a Dominican...He took out his Blackberry and called the local Dominican Sisters, handed me the phone and said, “Tell them you want to be a Dominican”...And I did!...The Sister on the phone said:
“That’s nice... Who are you?”

COMMENTARY

We all look forward to the May Meeting each year when several of the Novices who will make their Temporary Profession in June come and share their faith journey with us. This year was certainly no exception. I sometimes think that were we to *peer inside*, (so to speak) of any member of the Dominican Laity, one might very well discover a “Sister” or “Friar” — At the very least, individuals who share much in common with our Religious counterparts. I recognize that we are not mini-sisters or mini-friars; the Laity has its own vocation. We don’t live in a religious community or wear a habit, but we are nonetheless, as the Provincial Prayer states, “sharers in the common gifts” of the Dominican charism. Our abbreviated scapula, as well as our Dominican Cross, identifies and unites us as members of the Dominican Family. We too, seek out “community,” pray the Divine Office, have our individual apostolates, are faithful to the teachings of the Magisterium and are, therefore, united to that great tradition that stretches back to St. Dominic, St. Catherine of Siena, and St. Martin de Porres.

As we listened to each of the Novices, “our hearts burned within us”... We share with them the “wounds of love” ... we understand their vocation, their desire to imitate Christ in their lives. They are an example to us of the meaning of Truth, Freedom, Faith, Obedience, and the many other signs of a life which is centered in Christ.

In August, 2009, the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA), released the results of a rather thorough research project which studied “*Recent Vocations to Religious Life*.” CARA, which is located at Georgetown University in Washington, D.C., made their report (over 400 pages in length) to the National Religious Vocation Conference which was being held that year. The heart of that report was as follows:

“The most successful institutes in terms of attracting and retaining new members at this time are those that follow a more traditional style of religious life in which members live together in community and participate in daily Eucharist, pray the Divine Office, and engage in devotional practices together. They also wear a religious habit, work together in common apostolates, and are explicit about their fidelity to the Church and the teachings of the Magisterium. All of these characteristics are especially attractive to the young people who are entering religious life today.”

The previous year, in a National Study of Devotional Practices, CARA found that 48% of Catholics who do not attend Mass regularly also do not pray the Rosary, while among those who do attend Mass on a regular basis, only 2% pray the Rosary on a daily basis. Among those attending Mass very infrequently, 27% seldom wear a crucifix. Only 80% of practicing Catholics who attend Mass “weekly or more” have a statue, picture or some other religious object displayed in their home. The researchers also asked about Lenten observances. Less than half of the respondents (45%) receive ashes on Wednesday, and only about 60% abstain from meat on Fridays. I am not surprised; are you? This is why a *Religious Laity* is so desperately needed. Our Dominican presence can, and will, make a difference. As Dominican Laity, we need to invite others to a deeper relationship with Christ and His Church. We need to set the example—just as the Sisters are doing. This is our apostolate: the marketplace, our neighborhood, our very own parish!

Personally, I will take courage from the Novices. They remind me of what’s really important: For Sr. Paula Marie, it’s “making a real Lent” and then allowing herself to be absorbed by the Liturgy.... Sr. Marie Dominique helps me understand the importance of allowing my faith to fully be integrated into every aspect of my life.... Sr. Felicity reminds me that at the heart of our Dominican charism is a profound joy.... They are my example.... I, too, am going “*to pray everyday, die, and then go to Heaven!*”

I really liked what Marilyn Cox had to say about why we stand as the Sisters exit the Chapel after Evening Vespers: “*We stand out of respect and because our thoughts and prayers are united with you.*”





Post Script...

“Keep burning continually the sweet-smelling incense of prayer. Take up the sword of the Spirit. Let your heart be an altar. Then, with full confidence in God, present your body for a sacrifice to God. God desires not death, but faith; God thirsts not for blood, but for self-surrender; God is not appeased by slaughter, but by the offering of your free will.”

-from a Sermon by St. Peter Chrysologus, Liturgy of the Hours, Vol. II, p. 770

“God is that strange and disturbing reality whose love and power and goodness infinitely surpass our puny capacity to understand, or our pathetic attempts at control. Who are we? We are those creatures who are—whether we like it or not—tied to this divine storm, this uncontrollable force, this enigma, this abyss. And thus we are those whose lives are fulfilled in surrender and obedience—in the concrete ‘imitatio Christi’ the imitation of Christ....God’s most characteristic act is the jest of the Incarnation, and our appropriate response is sustained and soul-expanding laughter. Everything else is commentary.”

- from “Thomas Aquinas: Spiritual Master” by Fr. Robert Barron, p. 186