

# Dominican congregations assess 2009 merger

By Florence Herman  
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Two local Dominican sisters' congregations are in the process of forming a new congregation with five other Dominican sisters' congregations around the United States.

Leaders of both local congregations, the Dominican Sisters, Congregation of St. Mary, and the Eucharistic Missionaries of St. Dominic, view the approaching merger, scheduled to be completed in April 2009, as a positive step in their congregations' future yet at the same time letting each keep their individual charisms.

"We really all share the Dominican charism," said Congregation of St. Mary prioress Sister Angeline Magro. "But we each bring our geographic culture, history and richness to the whole group."

"Each congregation will bring their own gifts to the merger," said Eucharistic Missionary president Sister Dorothy Trosclair.

The other five congregations are in Oxford, Mich.; Great Bend, Kan.; Columbus, Ohio; St. Catharine, Ky.; and Akron, Ohio. The congregations work in more than 60 archdioceses and dioceses in the United States and abroad.

## 700 sisters

Together, they total more than 700 members, and the new congregation will help all of them broaden their perspective and move into new ministries.

"And with more members," Sister Angeline noted, "we can speak as one stronger voice on issues such as social justice."

"It will help broaden our sense of mission," Sister Dorothy said.

Both congregations decided to move toward the merger as a way to keep their future options open. Both faced dwindling numbers and dwindling resources.

"When we started exploring options back in the 1980s, we were 120," Sister Angeline said. "At that time, no other congregations were interested in doing this. But we've been looking for future solutions for a long time."

Today, they number 41, and the Eucharistic Missionaries number 30.

Work on the merger began in earnest in 2003. "First there was the Dominican Leadership Conference, which brought to-

gether congregations from all over the country," Sister Angeline said. "Then 13 banded together into an Alliance. As they worked, seven congregations indicated they wanted more than collaboration." In the initial stages of conversation, they formed a Cluster.

Sister Dorothy said her congregation was a member of the Alliance, and then, as they faced the future and choices to be made, decided to join the Cluster conversation. "By joining, we felt we would be in a position to help shape future decisions," she said.

Both leaders emphasize the merger will not affect their presence and ministry in the New Orleans Archdiocese.

"No, it doesn't mean we will be leaving New Orleans," Sister Angeline said. "We want to strengthen the Dominican identity in New Orleans."

The archdiocese more than ever needs a strong presence of women religious, said Sister Dorothy. And as part of a larger congregation, they will have access to personnel to help broaden their sense of mission.

## Unique hurdle

The Eucharistic Missionaries faced a unique hurdle in that, unlike many religious congregations, they were an archdiocesan entity, not a pontifical congregation. They were founded in Amite, La., in 1927.

"We had to work closely with Archbishop (Alfred) Hughes as we moved through the process," Sister Dorothy said. "He was supportive of us every step of the way."

They petitioned Rome to be given pontifical status, then, along with the other congregations, petitioned for permission to go forward with the merger.

"Many people don't realize that to form such a new congregation we need to get approval from Rome to form a new canonical union," Sister Angeline said. "And we also need to legally be one new civil corporation (as they combine assets)."

The Eucharistic Missionaries have never owned many assets other than their convents.

"Our gift has always been to work the highways and the byways and the bayous, finding out what people needed and leading them to those services," Sister Dorothy said.

Sister Angeline said for Dominican members there would be added benefits. "For instance, among the seven congregations, we have 31 people in leadership positions. The new congregation certainly won't need that many, so that frees sisters to work in ministry."

The merged congregation has no name, an issue that is under discussion. In fact,

that will be a topic of discussion at an intercongregational gathering to be held in June in New Orleans, as well as one in July in St. Louis. Any vowed member of the seven congregations is invited to take part.

The whole gathering and discussion period has been transparent to all members," Sister Angeline said. "Every sister was given the opportunity to serve on one of the committees."

Headquarters for the new congregation will be in Columbus, Ohio. "We looked at facilities of all our congregations," Sister Angeline said.

"The facility in Columbus is a new one, spacious and flexible. Besides," she added, "it is only 10 minutes from the airport."

After the intercongregational gathering this summer, a pre-Chapter Assembly will be held in the fall in St. Louis. Foundation Day will be April 12, 2009, and founding celebrations are planned to be held in the motherhouses April 14. The first general chapter of the new congregation will be held April 15-21, 2009, in St. Louis.

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## DOMINICAN CONGREGATIONS IN U.S. STUDYING MERGER

Seven congregations of Dominican sisters across the U.S., including two serving in the Archdiocese of New Orleans, are considering a merger. The two local congregations are committed to ministry in the archdiocese. Discussing a merger are

► **Dominican Sisters, Congregation of St. Mary**, New Orleans

► **Eucharistic Missionaries of St. Dominic**, New Orleans

► **Five other Dominican U.S. congregations**, Oxford, Mich.; Great Bend, Kan.; Columbus, Ohio; St. Catharine, Ky.; and Akron, Ohio.

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