

Welcome to the 2022 General Chapter by Pat Siemen, OP
June 27, 2022

My dear sisters,

Welcome back from our first break, Sisters. I add my Welcome, Bienvenidos, and Maligayan Pagdating to one and all. And a special welcome to all who watching via Livestream or on their televisions in Adrian!

What a beautifully moving opening prayer this morning prepared by our Chapter Ritual Committee. We'll be gifted by their ritual leadership throughout these five days together.

As I begin this morning I want, with the blessing of Divine Awakening, to officially convene our 19th General Chapter! I also want to note that today, June 27, marks the 99th year since we officially separated from the Second Street Dominican foundation in New York and we became an independent Congregation of the Most Holy Rosary on June 27, 1923. Next year marks our 100th anniversary!

We have been preparing for this General Chapter for over two years under the leadership of our Co-chairs Janet Doyle and Kathleen Klinglen. We are all aware of the numerous impacts that the global coronavirus pandemic has had on our world, our Congregation, and our General

Chapter planning. Instead of holding Chapter in February, at our preferred sacred venue in Adrian, we were delayed five months, and for the first time since the first General Chapter in 1924 – Chapter is not being held on the Motherhouse campus in Adrian. Of course, our Sisters from Edmonds, Washington and San Fernando, Pampanga, Philippines have differing stories regarding their previous Chapters. Delaying Chapter until now, and holding it in this hotel venue, *indicates our capacity for resilience and our adaptability*. I have no doubt that we will need to exercise both of those qualities of resiliency and adaptation many times these next five days as we compress a 10-day agenda into only 5 ½ days! But I’ve no doubt that Divine Awakening will breathe its Holy Spirit of Wisdom upon us and keep hovering over and within us, providing us with abundant gifts of clarity and creativity as we do the work that is uniquely ours to do at this particular moment of human and Earth evolutionary unfolding. By the way I want to note that our five days of Chapter is NOT the shortest Chapter in our history. In June 1924 the very first General Chapter of Congregation was held to elect a new Prioress and Council as Mother Camilla Madden died in January 1924, shortly after beginning as the first Prioress (Mother General) of the Congregation. That Election Chapter began on June 23 at 2:00 pm and was concluded by 4:00 pm the same day – with the election of Mother Augustine Walsh and Council.

While we gather as 124 delegates to General Chapter we become the highest authority in the Congregation while in session. It is our responsible to set forth the vision and commitments for our Enactments for the Chapter of 2022 – and elect our future leaders, our Prioress and members of the next General Council, who will take us into the future as vowed Dominican women. We will prayerfully, creatively, and joyfully take whatever risks are necessary for our being faithful to the Signs of the Times as we address the proposed Enactments which shine a lens on our Gospel responses to the unique hungers of the world and ourselves.

Our next leaders will inspire and lead us into a transformative future, one that is both unfolding, and enfolding us into an even more collaborative, international, intergenerational and perhaps, inter-congregational Dominican community. As we become fewer, we have the opportunity to become more vulnerable and transparent with one another. This is the time for us to hold sacred our relationships with one another and to create welcoming spaces, not only for ourselves, but also for others who are seeking community and expressions of prayerful solidarity with those who hunger to belong.

As we look at the faces of each other gathered here in communion with one another, we see the reflection of who we are, and who we are

becoming. There is greater diversity among us, diversity not only of skin tones and cultures, but also of race, languages (this is our first Chapter to have interpreters with us so ALL can participate fully). Our Awakening Circles stirred our desire for a transformed consciousness as we embrace the Christ presence embedded and incarnated within the unfolding of the Universe and the Earth and human community.

As we gather we bring a rich diversity of thought, forms of prayer, traditions, and ministries. We come aware of the powerhouse of prayer that our Sisters who are not here are providing us from the Motherhouse, the Philippines, Norway, and across the country. We come seeking a single-heartedness, and a desire for communion with God and each other, which makes us one. This is a time for renewing – and making new – sister friends as we joyfully respond to the calls of the Gospel in this incredible time of change. As Pope Francis says, we are called to live *not only in an era of change, but a change of era itself*.

As we begin our 5 ½ days of Chapter, I am reminded of the words that our keynote speaker Valarie Kaur offered us last February as she invited us into living a revolutionary love in these times of division and violence. She reminded us that transformative love requires both a revolutionary strength – and a deep humility – as we strive to love in the midst of racial, cultural, and gender violence of any kind. Valarie,

who is Sikh, calls us, like Jesus, to “see no strangers.” She invites us to see that all life is interconnected. Revolutionary love calls us to practice a love that is not just for others but includes a love for ourselves as well. And like Jesus, she teaches us how to practice a radical love for our opponents – and those who feel like enemies at the moment.

Revolutionary love is transformational; it creates safe and brave spaces for everyone, and most particularly for those who feel vulnerable, misunderstood, or are desiring to explore new creative alternatives.

Creating spaces and places of welcome in the future may indeed be a part of the risk-taking being asked of us. Regardless of our age or capacity for external ministry, we can each make space for those in need, for those who are economically poor, for those suffering from rejection or are marginalized. Some of us can do so directly and others of us will do so through the power of our prayer and presence. All of us can offer hospitality and a listening heart in some way.

As we begin our 19th General Chapter we do so knowing we have the entire Congregation, Sisters and Associates, Co-Workers, Partners in Mission and Sisters of other Congregations holding us in prayer. We call on the Holy Spirit of Wisdom and Divine Awakening to guide and inspire us during these days of focused deliberation and creative visioning. We depend on the prayers of our sisters at home. And we call upon those

who have died and gone ahead of us to be present with us, especially our foremothers and the 228 sisters who died during the past six years. During this time we have said goodbye to five former Prioresses who with us during the General Chapter of 2016. We call upon them – Miichelle Kopp, Nadine Foley, Rosemary Ferguson, Janet Capone and Zenaida Nacpil – to be present with us here. I’ve no doubt that they are urging us to be bold, wise, and tender with one another as we risk living our one, precious, and authentic lives rooted in Gospel values and a desire for a Christ consciousness so needed today.

I believe our foremothers are graciously, yet firmly, pushing us to listen to the call of Divine Awakening for this moment in time. May each of us, as Angeles Arriens describes, come each day to Chapter with open, full, strong and clear hearts. This requires an intention and attention to what has heart and meaning for us. It requires a curiosity about what someone else means when she speaks. It requires a deep self- knowing, a grounding in one’s Soul’s depth, and hearts that remain vulnerable and open. Our foremothers and Holy Wisdom are urging us to embrace “the transformative change being asked of us as we co-create the future.” They reassure us that we will not walk this Chapter journey alone. We are accompanied by the presence of Lady Wisdom, as well as

our Lady of Altagracia and our Lady of Remedies, sharing this sacred journey with us.

As we look to the future, and especially to the next six years, may we embrace an emergent Christ consciousness that calls us to examine our complicity in white privilege and do the reparational work of creating new inclusionary, anti-racist paths while also undoing cultural biases. May we celebrate interculturality and the many expressions of diversity. May we continue caring for the common good of Earth and all its beings, and pay special attention to those who are most wounded, economically poor, and vulnerable. May we address the issues patriarchy and its impact on women, especially in women's equity, agency and access to health care. May we deepen our and others' search for meaning and nourish our spirituality as vowed Dominican women. Let us claim anew our Dominican identity and future as we intentionally invite others to join with us in a global sisterhood.

As we look to the future, we pray that we will be gifted with some new seekers and members. Given our median age of 83, we will likely continue to bury about 35-40 of our dear sisters each year. That means that in just six years, at our Chapter of 2028, we may have a membership of around 200 sisters, with a median age of 86. While this reality is sobering, recognizing it now frees us to intentionally co-create

our future with a sense of inner freedom and an attentiveness to God's faithfulness and surprises. Our Edmonds and Remedies sisters have already experienced a significant letting go of a particular identity – and still embrace God's designs and a future full of hope.

May each of us experience an inner freedom and inner joy that comes with being smaller, more agile, more intentional, more vulnerable and more in need of truly being “sister” to one another as we grow into creating a beloved community. As we have prayed the last two years, may “we dare to risk the transformative change that is being asked of us as we co-create the future.”

In closing, I draw upon the words of our father, Dominic Guzmán, who in his last will and testament, prayed:

*Behold, my children, the heritage I leave you:
Have charity for one another; Guard humility;
Make your treasure out of voluntary poverty*

O Divine Awakening, enkindle our creative fire, Awaken us to Love.

Thank you, and I now turn this back over to Mark.