Rising Spirit
Impact of Vatican II on Adrian Dominican Sisters
Sometime prior to the 1968 General Chapter of Renewal we began a study and discussion of what we affectionately (or not so) called “The Blue Books.” Written by J.M.R. Tillard, OP, the four books explored the purpose and significance of religious life.

Were religious to be nothing more than auxiliaries for specialized tasks, such as preaching, teaching or certain works of charity? No, but neither were we to be part of an aristocracy with respect to other modes of life. Religious were to adapt to the needs of the day, even at the price of great sacrifice. We were to witness the presence of God to all we encountered, and to seek the voice of God in all things, as God speaks in the events of daily life.

Although written by the same author in a fairly stilted style, the books provoked a first attempt among us to begin sharing with one another profound questions about our role in Church and society. We had never before engaged in these kinds of serious discussions—and have not ceased doing so since!

The reflections contained in this publication celebrate the far-reaching impact of Vatican II on the Adrian Dominican Sisters in the 50 years since Pope John XXIII summoned the Ecumenical Council in 1961, convening it the following October. Every woman in our Congregation who went through these times undoubtedly has her own story of transformation to tell.
Those who have entered or associated with us since renewal give witness, as the authors in this issue convey, to a clear understanding that the joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of our world, especially among the poor and afflicted, are ours as followers of Christ.

As Church and members of a religious congregation, we crossed a major threshold through Vatican II during a very challenging and transformative time in our world. I believe we are at another crossroads today, perhaps the most pivotal in my lifetime. Our planet is imperiled by unsustainable consumption and potentially catastrophic climate change. Enormous wealth is held by a powerful few nations and individuals while the middle class shrinks and millions around the world suffer poverty and disease. Many others are caught in the crosshairs of war and violence provoked by greed, hatred or fear of the “other.”

Vatican II gave rise to enormous hope, which carried us through the difficult challenges of the ’60s and ’70s. Today, however, I see a great lack of hope in our world. Many seem to have lost their way and are looking for inspiration and reassurance.

We know our resources are limited—those of our planet, our world and our Congregation. We ourselves are older now, and fewer in number. Yet we have within us wonderful powers of the Spirit. In vowed commitment, our hearts are oriented beyond ourselves; we remain free, available to serve the common good of all God’s creation. As vowed women and Associates, we must constantly be in dialogue with “the signs of the times,” as Vatican II reminded us, in order to determine to what we are being called.

History tells us that when we are called, we find extraordinary ways to respond. Our response today may not be as measurable as in days past, but it will speak no less faithfully. We still hold the power to bring the Spirit of God, movement toward a transformed world, to those who need it most.

Attracta Kelly, OP
Prioress

Attracta Kelly, OP entered in 1958. Prior to her election as Prioress of the Congregation at the General Chapter of 2010, she served as supervising attorney and project director at the North Carolina Justice Center.
Four months after Mother Mary Genevieve Weber was elected Mother General of the Adrian Dominican Sisters in the summer of 1962, the historic Vatican Council II, called by Pope John XXIII, opened in Rome. For Pope John it was to be an event of aggiornamento, updating, opening of the windows to let in fresh air. For the Adrian Dominican Sisters, it was to initiate through Mother Genevieve’s six-year term the most transformative period in the history of the Congregation. As each of the documents of the Council was issued, Sisters of the Congregation read them avidly. They eagerly waited for the one on religious life. Perfectae Caritatis, the Decree on the Renewal of Religious Life was issued by Pope Paul VI on October 28, 1965, shortly before the Council adjourned on December 8, 1965. Most of those who read it did not find it particularly stimulating.

The following summer, Pope Paul VI issued a Motu Proprio, which contained the process for implementing the Decree on Religious Life. Directed to the superiors general of all religious institutes throughout the world, men and women alike, its contents were to consume the time and energy of Mother Genevieve for the remainder of her term in office.

There were three significant directives for implementation of the Decree on Religious Life: there was to be a General Chapter of Renewal within three years; all members of the institute were to be consulted in preparation for the Chapter; and certain norms of the Constitution could be altered “provided that the purpose, nature and character of the institute were preserved.” With due diligence, Mother Genevieve set these directives in motion.

The Congregation numbered approximately 2,200 members at the time that Mother Genevieve took office. It was no small task to provide a way in which every Sister could be consulted in preparation for the General Chapter, which was set for the summer of 1968. On July 11, 1966, Mother Genevieve issued a long-range plan preparatory for the required General Chapter. It was particularly sensitive to the stipulation that all Sisters of the Congregation should be consulted. This provision was new to the members of the Congregation. Earlier General Chapters had focused on the election of the Congregation leaders with relatively few other issues. Some will remember that among the decisions of the General Chapters were: the Sisters could have wristwatches; on home visits they could extend daily visits from 7:00 pm to 8:00 pm. These kinds of issues proved trivial compared to what came forth in preparation for the Renewal Chapter that began in 1966.

The plan that Mother Genevieve sent out involved three phases:

1. Study and discussion of materials related to the renewal of religious life. These materials were made available to all the Sisters.

2. The division of the Congregation into 13 geographical regions. Each region was to elect a chairperson and two other members. The chairpersons of the regions were to constitute a Central Committee for the Congregation in preparation for the General Chapter of Renewal.
3. Suggestions, summaries and recommendations from the regions were to be sent to the Motherhouse for tabulation.

There was one additional important responsibility that Mother Genevieve gave to the Central Committee. As part of the renewal process, each congregation was to write a new constitution. In May of 1967 she wrote to the regional chairpersons assigning them to spend the summer at St. Paul Convent in Grosse Pointe, Michigan, where they were to work on a draft of a new constitution for the Congregation.

In a letter of May 30, 1967, Mother Genevieve wrote in appreciation of the work of the Central Committee. She said, in part:

It would be difficult to truly evaluate the tremendous work that has been done by the area committees throughout the country. Their effort to solicit the thinking, to encourage study and discussion, and to stimulate the effect of intensive research on all phases of our Dominican religious life has made a tremendous contribution to our first steps of renewal. We realize that renewal is not something that happens today and then stops abruptly, but rather it is a continuous process.

Mother Genevieve also devised a plan for the election of delegates to the General Chapter which she revised after receiving responses from the Sisters. The Chapter convened with 135 delegates, an unprecedented number by comparison to earlier General Chapters. The General Chapter of 1962 had 42 delegates, half of whom were local superiors.

Mother Genevieve was a very compassionate woman who had special concern for the frail and elderly of the Congregation. She addressed the need for improved healthcare facilities by building what was then called Maria Hall to replace the aging St. Clement Infirmary. It was dedicated in 1969. She had similar care for the young Sisters in formation in razing the old North Building which had served as a novitiate and building a new facility that came to be called Weber Center. It was completed and opened to receive the delegates to the General Chapter of Renewal in 1968. She followed up on some projects initiated by her predecessor, Mother Mary Gerald Barry. One was the building of St. Dominic College in St. Charles, Illinois, completed in 1964. The two hospitals in California were consolidated into Dominican Santa Cruz Hospital, a new facility, dedicated in 1967. She expanded the Congregation’s ministry overseas by sending Sisters to Peru.

At the end of the General Chapter of Renewal Mother Genevieve reflected upon what it had accomplished. She said in part,

… I see a very great desire that each one of us will be able to live that [religious life] without someone having legislation for it. I appreciate that. But I do beg that each and every one of us will support those who do not understand or quite comprehend the obligation that each of us is taking upon herself; that we see their weakness and we will not leave them unaided…. We can talk about maturity but there are degrees of maturity, so that each one of us who has had this experience of the Chapter must be a support for those who need our support.

A number of times Mother Genevieve reminded the Sisters that renewal was not something that terminated with the Chapter of Renewal. Renewal was an ongoing project.

In that conviction she was prophetic.

Nadine Foley, OP entered in 1945. A former Prioress, Nadine has served as the Congregation historian for the past 16 years and is the author of the second volume of Adrian Dominican history, Seeds Scattered and Sown (2006).
The Letter! It was in early January of 1968 when I arrived in Adrian from Rosarian Academy in West Palm Beach, to attend a superiors’ meeting. Upon arrival, I was asked if I had received the letter from Mother Genevieve. No, I hadn’t. I had evidently left Florida before the letter arrived. I was brought into Mother Genevieve’s office and engaged in a conversation about staying in Adrian to co-chair with Sister Mary Paul (Noreen) McKeough, the coordination of preparations for the General Chapter of Renewal, which would begin that summer. I realized the conversation was emerging from an exploratory conversation to a charge. Sister Mary Paul and I had been serving on the Chapter Planning Central Committee. Now we were being asked to engage in this task full-time. Although stunned and a bit confused, I accepted the appointment.

Sister Mary Paul and I, along with the other 11 elected regional leaders, formed what was now called the Pre-Chapter Commission. The group determined that the first action needed was to involve our Sisters directly in expressing their ideas and concerns. A proposal process was devised and simple forms sent to the Sisters. Over five months, 1,046 proposals were received in the following categories: Dominican Life and Apostolate, Government, Works of the Congregation, Formation, Economics, Constitution and Communication. I did not realize how significant these categories were; they became the major agenda topics for the Chapter of Renewal.

Early on a major challenge emerged for the need to provide education regarding the purpose of the Renewal Chapter and the function of the Pre-Chapter Commission. Among some of the Sisters there was a level of anxiety and misunderstanding. Sister Mary Paul went cross-country and made 25 presentations with Q/A sessions. Her presentations, presence and credibility helped to diminish some of the fear and concern. Timely communication was important and periodic bulletins were sent to keep the members informed.

Change was in the air. There was excitement about the future but some real disconnects as well. Our religious life class was based on a circumscribed view of the world and women’s place in it. Theology classes told us a whole new world was emerging. We sensed and breathed Pope John XXIII’s “fresh air.” We studied the documents of Vatican II, even as we read Thomas Aquinas and wrote papers on his works. A year after I made first profession, the Chapter of 1968 opened the door. The next Chapter permitted observers. “Chapter of the whole” followed—all Sisters in the community would have a voice in shaping our common future.

Janice Holkup, OP entered the Dominican Sisters of Edmonds in 1964. An artist, she has served as an art teacher for most of her religious life.
The months of intense preparation passed quickly as materials were prepared and coordination of campus services was finalized. Sister Mary Paul and I felt a sense of relief that our task was completed. I experienced a certain freedom and excitement in my role as delegate to this Chapter that was to be a General Chapter like no other in our history.

The General Chapter of Renewal commenced on June 21, 1968. Committees formed quickly. Position papers were written, actions discussed and official enactments resulted. One month later, on July 22, the election of the General Council took place, bringing in new leaders who immediately took office and would be responsible for implementing the Chapter mandates. During the final week, the delegates completed and voted on the “Interim Official Acts of Session I” and the first of three sessions officially closed on July 28, 1968.

After 50 years, history has preserved the documents of Vatican II and the results of the General Chapter of Renewal of the Adrian Dominican Congregation. What we do not have preserved in writing is what happened and is happening to the hearts, minds and spirits of our Sisters. Sister Laurence Edward (Rosemary) Ferguson, who was elected Prioress General at that pivotal Chapter, captured this in the Prologue of the Report to the Congregation (1968-1973):

The 1968 General Chapter of Renewal, following Vatican II, most radically changed our lives and called us to a transformation, to a conversion, that none of us at that time could have envisioned.

Jeanne Burns, OP entered in 1947 and was elected Vicaress at the General Chapter of 1968; currently retired, she was involved in education as a teacher and administrator and in hospital ministry as chaplain and vice president.

Susan Gardner, OP entered in 1964 and is a minister of lay formation at the Nelson House Catholic Community in the Archdiocese of Keewatin-Le Pas in Manitoba, Canada.

The Church I ministered in would be different from the one in which I grew up. Changes would come in clothes, ministry opportunities and especially in our freedom to be with “the people of God,” leading me eventually to my present ministry: helping First Nations people take their rightful place in Church.

As novices preparing for first profession in 1966, we asked our families for a copy of the new missal. We would soon celebrate Mass in Holy Rosary Chapel in English! I remember our excited preparations, especially learning new songs. It was like anticipating a big feast day. The Church I ministered in would be different from the one in which I grew up.
The 1968 General Chapter of Renewal of the Adrian Dominican Sisters began on June 21 with perceptible openness, inclusiveness and momentum. On its first day, motions were made and passed to waive the accustomed session-secrecy mandate on delegates, as well as the tradition of voting by age in religion. Another motion was made and passed to admit two temporary professed Sisters to full delegate status, making a total delegation of 135 voting capitulars, representing designated age and regional populations from across the United States and Latin America. Yet another motion made and passed on the first day allowed six non-delegate observers to be present in selected Chapter sessions.

In the course of the first month, the number of observers was increased from six to 24, to 30, then to 54. Hundreds of non-delegate Sisters traveled to Adrian on weekends from Detroit, Chicago and beyond to take advantage of the observer privilege. This large group of eyewitnesses returned with first-hand experience and greater understanding of the issues under deliberation. They transmitted the spirit and life of the Renewal Chapter beyond the accounts reaching members by daily telephone messages and periodic news bulletins.

Whereas earlier General Chapters had been completed in around three days, the Renewal Chapter was held from 1968 to 1970, in three summer sessions of varied lengths. The breadth and depth of communal study and reflective dialogue across the Congregation in preparation for the Chapter brought a host of issues to the table. The demands of the resulting “roots-up” agenda necessitated making about how to live a vowed communal life of prayer and loving service into the future.

A pivotal enactment that first summer called for monthly “Community Chapters” to be held by members at the local level between Chapter sessions. The Community Chapters followed a basic structure shaped by a pertinent theme, Scripture-based prayer, reflective discussion and collegial decision-making about local policies and practices. The Chapter delegates also mandated a congregational self-study to facilitate responsible decision-making about corporate allocations of resources and ministerial placements.

While working together through hundreds of issues raised by the membership, the delegates were recognizing, embodied among themselves, leadership qualities needed in transitional times. On July 22, they accordingly elected Sister Laurence Edward (Rosemary) Ferguson as Prioress General of the Congregation, with Sisters Thomas Raymond (Jeanne) Burns, Mary Paul (Noreen) McKeough, Margaret Michaella (Dorothy) Folliard, and Mary Julita (Mary Therese) McCarthy as General Council. Sisters elected as Congregation officers: John Bride (Mary Catherine) Jordan, Secretary, and Mary Christopher (Kathryn) Noonan, Treasurer.

During the ensuing year, the General Councilors and Chapter delegates visited members around the country and at their provincial assemblies, sharing their understanding of the Chapter Enactments that had emerged to date, and the need for every member to participate in the unfolding transitions in communal life and apostolic service. The mandated self-study also involved every member in an in-depth examination of all aspects of
community life and work through questionnaires, meetings and interviews.

Meanwhile, during their monthly Community Chapters, Sisters across the country chose themes from the 1968 Chapter Report/Enactments as topics for reflection and discussion. These monthly meetings led to growth in experience of collegial decision-making.

By the summer of 1969, the reconvened delegates were ready to approve unanimously a statement of identity and purpose linking vowed life to loving service. Seven accompanying policy statements presented this renewed framework as a basis for co-responsible decision-making about life and work. At the regional assemblies held during the ensuing year, intermediate governance structures emerged, adapting this renewed framework to suit regional needs.

In the summer of 1970, during the final session of the General Chapter of Renewal, the delegates approved 90 Chapter Enactments encompassing all aspects of renewing communal life and work. These ranged from “wearing what is appropriate” to creating structures for local and collegial decision-making. It would now be up to the members of the Congregation to implement this foundational legislation.

Many Sisters looking back on this initial renewal period identify the “Community Chapter” structure as one of the principal ways they began to “interiorize new concepts and ideas, and to become more at ease in sharing thoughts,” as Chapter minutes note. When the 1974 General Chapter mandated studies on justice, Community Chapters were adapted to facilitate the education. The 1974 Chapter published seven goals, each emphasizing pertinent aspects of Gospel justice, together providing criteria for co-responsible decision-making in all areas of Congregation “life and ministry.” The vocabulary choice evident in the word ministry (not apostolate) reflected some of the mutual growth in new concepts and ideas.

The recommended prayer/study themes for pursuing justice education under the adapted Community Chapter structure suggested broad topics like the “Gospel meaning of justice,” the “social teachings of the Church,” the “political, social and economic systems in relation to the Gospel,” the “ways in which each of us is oppressor and oppressed.” The reflection/discussion group composition was to be self-organizing, without geographic stricture, to encourage informal linking of groups for further exchange of knowledge and perspective. Faithful implementation of these directives by the members promoted a deeper consciousness of the Congregation’s identity and purpose “in the mission of Jesus.”

The 1978 Chapter delegation used this mission concept to vitalize co-responsible decision-making in all areas of Congregation life and ministry. The Chapter adopted a renewal Mission Statement:

In the mission of Jesus we Adrian Dominican Sisters discover and identify ourselves as women called together to share faith and life with one another and sent into our world to be with others bearers and recipients of his love, co-creators of his justice and peace.

Jeanne Lefebvre, OP entered in 1956 and has served on the faculty of Siena Heights University for the past 30 years, teaching history and religious studies.
Vatican II came to be the response to the signs of the times in Latin America and the Caribbean. Its opening to ecumenism and the modern world impelled not only courageous decisions in the lives of countless Christians but also an explosion of creativity. It signaled a time of awakening consciousness, which we experienced in the Dominican Republic in the form of social uprisings following years of brutal dictatorship. In 1965, the people sought a return of democratically elected President Juan Bosch, who had been identified with communism and deposed in 1963 after only seven months in office. A popular uprising in 1965 was defeated within days when 42,000 U.S. Marines landed in Santo Domingo to “avoid another Cuba.”

The Council’s documents underscoring the dignity of the human person and primacy of conscience opened the door for us to study diverse philosophies and critical theories, including Marxism. This study, in turn, set us on a new path. We recognized ourselves as adults with a right to self-determination. We knew we could not accept leftist allegations against Christians that we were cruel and unjust; Christianity’s call is to love one’s neighbor. But through critical analysis, we came to understand what the Latin American bishops would recognize a few years later during their 1968 conference in Medellín, Colombia: the contradictions inherent in the outmoded political and social structures of our countries constituted a form of institutionalized violence.

We awakened to the reality of poverty—something we Sisters could not comprehend from within our enclosed convents. We re-thought the curriculum at our Congregation-sponsored Colegio Santo Domingo, creating a “liberation education” intended to ground our students in an understanding of the realities of our country. A number of us Adrian Dominican Sisters went into the barrios accompanied by girls from the Colegio to engage with the poor. We obtained accreditation so that our students could earn credit hours for their work to increase literacy among adults, record people’s living conditions, examine public hospitals, and offer messages of hope by staging plays, music and dance.

Our students began to understand that they could not turn their backs on the harsh reality lived by the great majority of our people, and developed greater sensitivity. A number were ready to dispossess themselves of things they had previously considered a part of their normal life. We Sisters similarly were sensitized. When the girls started to decline elaborate birthday parties, luxurious clothing and visits abroad, their parents began to complain. We were called communists and accused of brainwashing their daughters.

It soon became clear that we would not be able to continue with this kind of liberation education among the children of the wealthy. At our Mission Congress in 1973, we Adrian Dominican Sisters formally articulated an option for the poor. It was expressed the following year in the Congregation’s decision to hand over the Colegio to the Archdiocese of Santo Domingo—and would continue to shape us to the present day.

We had adopted the position that we would make no decision without considering its impact on the poor, our sisters and brothers in Christ. Throughout Latin America and the Caribbean, others made a similar commitment to be in solidarity with the poor. The spirit of this shared ideal soon caught fire around the world.

Margarita Ruiz, OP entered in 1953. She now teaches at the Dominican Institute of Theology and at the Inter-Congregation Center of Religious Studies in the Dominican Republic.
In the years following the Second Vatican Council, I was teaching elementary school in Chicago and would have labeled myself as being “dragged along” in terms of the changes that resulted from the Council. I was not an early enthusiast of change! However, all that shifted when, in 1974, I was invited by the General Council to consider going to seminary. It was in the midst of my studies that my whole worldview was altered. Toward the end of my study, I was asked to serve on the committee to revise our Constitution and Statutes.

At our first meeting in the spring of 1978, we realized that we had to start from scratch. Our old Constitution (1944, revised in 1962) and even the beautiful interim document written by Sister Patrick Jerome (Mary) Mullins were not of much help. We knew that our new Constitution needed to flow out of our Dominican story and history (Vatican II mandate) and had to incorporate attention both to concern for the individual Sister and to our reconfigured government structure.

To do this work adequately, we needed an environment where we could spend quality time together without outside distractions (even though this was well before cell phones and laptops!). Sisters Nadine Foley, Miriam Mullins and Teresa Disch were all living in Adrian, which we agreed would never provide us with the space and quiet we needed. We finally settled on the seminary in Ogdensburg, New York, where Sister Mary Tardiff was a faculty member. We soon discovered that there were no distractions in Ogdensburg, except perhaps the ships moving down the St. Lawrence Seaway! We spent two weeks together over each of the next three summers, doing preparatory study and drawing up a draft document.

To develop the Constitution, we needed to know Dominican history, our own and the Order’s; we had to become well acquainted with Church teaching; we had to immerse ourselves in the Vatican II documents; and we had to reread the many documents from our Chapter of Renewal and subsequent Chapters. These documents, especially *The Church in the Modern World*, suggested to us a language that would focus on mission. We also decided that a poetic style was more appropriate for the Constitution, while a prose style would be used for statute material. The first draft was distributed to the Congregation in January of 1981. We held “listening” sessions around the Congregation, and met the following January to prepare the second draft for the General Chapter of 1982, when the Constitution was approved. (Other revisions had to be made after the document was reviewed in Rome.)

The opportunity to serve in this capacity with such wise and wonderful women was extremely rewarding and enriching. The work helped me to prepare for the ministry in which I would eventually engage—teaching theology in an ecumenical environment in the heart of economically devastated Detroit. In order to respect the theology of other religious traditions and cultures, I had to know my own very well, and then try to adapt my “Catholic language” to the language that articulates other theologies. These theologies have been indispensable as I teach students who will minister in a global world.

Anneliese Sinnott, OP entered in 1955 and is a professor of systematic theology at the Ecumenical Theological Seminary in Detroit, Michigan.
It was in the air before it happened. In the spirit of things stirring to fruition.

In the Liturgical Art conferences that changed environments with each session, that gathered enormous crowds for Eucharist with Father Clarence Rivers leading a chant as an empowered assembly came to life. In Pope John XXIII’s call for a window to be opened to let in the Spirit.

A whole realm of possibility opened in what it is to be Christian, to be one people, to be in and for the world. We worshiped with students in storefront Catholic Worker Eucharists. We knew ourselves to be on a creative edge. It broke in upon us that our God, in Jesus, is incarnate, in this world, among us.

A spatial difference—no longer to pray “up” to God, but God is here, in the midst of who we are.

Exciting, because we ourselves now become a part of unfolding this great good news among us. So many ways to do it, to live it. Out of each person’s singular perception comes a new way of unfolding this realization to others. To see ourselves as artists, not as makers of things, but as vehicles of transformation of consciousness. To awaken ourselves and others to this miracle of Incarnation.

And so we began a ministry of space installations—meditative circumstances that invited persons entering them to re-experience the world. To ask, “Does McDonald’s do it...”

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When I was a child I used to draw on the walls in my closet. Later, as a calligrapher, I was fascinated by and studied illuminated manuscripts. In 1992, I was working at Dominican Hospital in Santa Cruz when I read the Vision Statements that emerged from the General Chapter of the Adrian Dominican Sisters. I was so taken by them, I created a scroll, illustrating the statements in calligraphy: “We stand in communion with the women in our world... We break our silence of complicity... We claim our freedom to liberate the creative-woman spirit.” Three years later, I entered the Congregation, falling in love with our rich history and that of the Dominican family. It is my passion to tell our story, in beautiful form and function, and I was privileged recently to collaborate with our Iraqi Dominican Sisters in publishing their history, Drawn by Love. Creating the page for words, drop caps, in English and Arabic, reminded me of the monks who labored in the monasteries, a much different process, but with the same passion and desire to share the written word today—beautifully.

Aneesah McNamee, OP entered in 1995 and is dedicated to applying her craft to telling the unfolding story of Dominican life.
all for you?” To enter “City of Surfeit,” a burial chamber of containers/bottles/stuff that all of us generated, and have the poor looking out from within them, at us.

Asked by women religious to bring Vatican II sensibility into their institutional worship spaces, so that altering a space might transform the community. We asked the community, “What do you desire to become?” and endeavored to bring about a space that would call them to that.

Called by young parishes in Maine, in Texas, in Illinois to help each group step into a circumstance of renewal and outreach. To envision spaces—Sanctuary of Hope for the homeless in Chicago, or a spiritual center that gathered Muslim/Jewish/Christians toward each other within the environment of a garden.

To discover from Vatican II, that each dimension of being can awaken awareness. That space is a gift with profound potential of opening us to life. That art can transport us, lift what is ordinary to a new plane, that of the experience of God.

Rita Schiltz, OP entered in 1943; Barbara Chenicek, OP in 1953; they founded INAI Studio, Adrian, Michigan, whose thrust since 1973 has been design of contemporary sacred space.
The God image I brought with me as I entered religious life was of a God who was loving, good and merciful. God did, however, have fairly high expectations; as a woman given the gift of a religious vocation, I was to strive for perfection, to live the “perfection of charity.”

Striving for perfection demanded separation from the world, adhering to a daily horarium with every segment of the day spoken for and a strong emphasis upon obedience as conformity to external norms. I embraced all of this because I was taught and believed that this was God’s will for me, a secure way to serve others and save my own soul.

As Vatican II opened and its documents were promulgated, I experienced vast shifts in my understanding of God, religious life and myself. John XXIII called Vatican II a Council not of reform but of renewal. Some religious observances that constituted our daily practices were actually accretions of piety from other cultures and centuries. These were pared away so that the essence of Dominican religious life could emerge more fully.

I learned that God is not only good and merciful but extravagantly so. I learned that the only purpose for my existence is that God could be self-gift to me. I learned that much of the emphasis upon my obligations, my responsibilities, my working toward perfection was wrong. Life wasn’t about me, what I should do, what I should be; it was about God, God’s working within me, calling me to greater life and love, peace and happiness.

The notion of separation from the world gave way to reclaiming Dominic’s missionary vocation, becoming sensitized to the world’s deep hunger to hear, understand and live the good news of the Gospel. I became aware of a new consciousness of the immense privilege of discipleship, called, as Mark says, “to be with him, to be sent out to proclaim the message, and to cast out demons [i.e., to confront injustice when it arises].”

The ministry to which I’ve been called for the greater part of my adult life has involved facilitating in other people an understanding of and a mature and confident relationship with the God we met in Vatican II. The gratitude, the joy, and the sense of fulfillment this work has brought me has never deserted me to this very day.

Carol Johannes, OP entered in 1950. A former Prioress of the Congregation, she has been engaged in spiritual direction and retreat work for 30 years.

I entered religious life during a time of creative tension. Few Sisters were entering the Congregation; many were leaving. Still, I was at peace, having a feeling that the Spirit was “a-movin.” We gathered often to explore the initial vision and energy of our founder, as well as topics in social justice and feminism. During the novitiate, Mother Benedicta Bauer’s words—“travel constantly!”—became a reality, as we hit the road, connecting with our Sisters across the country.

Spirit was “a-movin.” As the years unfolded, I learned the story of our evolutionary Universe. Spirit continued to move within me. I no longer saw the face of God reflected in humans alone; all parts of creation communicate an aspect of the divine. We are members of the whole of our Earth community. This informs the way I move in my life and gives me the energy to serve, with others, the deepest needs of our day.

Mary Ellen Leciejewski, OP entered in 1972; since 1996 she has served as the Ecology Program Coordinator for Catholic Healthcare West, a 40-hospital system in California, Arizona and Nevada.
During Vatican II, I was teaching in Detroit. Our own Cardinal John Dearden was an important voice at the Council and we were well informed about the proceedings, reading and discussing the documents when they were published.

As we began the process of renewal, the move to update our theology was significant. Well-known theologians, such as Piet Schoonenberg, were invited to Adrian to assist us. Liturgical renewal enhanced our prayer life with meaningful English translations of the prayers and readings. It took a while for beautiful liturgical music to develop in English but it happened and new hymns took their place alongside our beloved Latin ones.

The horizons for our areas of ministry began to expand. In small groups we explored the question, “How is my ministry part of the mission of the Church, which carries on the mission of Christ in the world?” This led us to examine the role of women in the Church. I took part in an historical study of the ministry of women in the first six centuries of Christianity, undertaken by Patrologist Father Jean LaPorte of the University of Notre Dame. The work of dedicated women in the early missionary endeavors of the Church was impressive. Among women with specific roles in Church communities were canonical widows, who served as elders and leaders of women; ordained deaconesses, who assisted the bishop; and consecrated virgins, who had a ministry of prayer. Later, abbesses held strong leadership roles.

In 1974 I was invited to join Sisters Joan Delaplane, Mary Tardiff and Anneliese Sinnott in studying in seminary for four years. We enjoyed the same fine education as the young men studying for the priesthood. After seminary, I began the work most dear to my Dominican heart, teaching theology; it was my way of entering into the mission of Christ. After a few years of teaching, I was able to pursue a Doctorate in Sacred Theology with a concentration in Mariology.

Our Adrian Dominican Constitution refers to Mary as “a woman of strength who experienced poverty and suffering. She witnessed through her life and her Magnificat the qualities of justice, peace, mercy and love.” I have always had a special devotion to Mary; it has been a privilege to preach retreats and write on Mary’s Song. I now am endeavoring to understand Mary in an ecumenical perspective, exploring her role as a highly respected figure in Islam, with the Qur’an making 34 references to her.

Mary Catherine Nolan, OP entered the Congregation in 1951. A theologian and mariologist, she is now retired from full-time teaching but continues to write and lecture, with a special interest in ecumenical dialogue.

I entered after working as an attorney, primarily representing large corporate clients. I had resisted the call to religious life because I feared losing opportunities open to lay women. When I met the Dominicans I fell in love with the charism, especially the search for truth and St. Dominic’s nine ways of prayer. The opportunity to pursue these in community with others who shared my passion was irresistible. I was encouraged to use my gifts, converting them to serve the Church and the Gospel. My ministry in canon law has been aimed at making available to people the freedom law can provide within the Church. My recent work in ethics focuses on minimal, universal standards of justice, informed by a theology of wonder and wisdom. My Dominican Sisters continue to challenge me to contribute to the myriad ministries, common life, and shared wisdom through which we together seek and speak truth in Church and society.

Carolyn A. Roeber, OP entered the Dominican Sisters of Edmonds in 1983; she serves as Collegial Judge/Auditor in the Tribunal of the Archdiocese of Seattle and is currently a Ph.D. candidate in ethics.
In 1961, I was back in the States after three years in Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic, where my experiences of living and working with our Latina Sisters instilled in me a deep appreciation for their cultures. As Vatican II began, I was teaching in Miami Beach where half of my students were recently arrived from Cuba, experiencing great emotional difficulty.

At the time, John F. Kennedy was president and our pope was a jolly Italian overflowing with love and a fresh approach to “opening the windows” of a stuffy Church. The press corps nicknamed him “Johnny Walker” because he would slip out of the Vatican compound and wander around Rome. It was a fun time to be a Catholic.

I responded to the call to renewal with enthusiasm, having become deeply involved in the social movements of the late 1960s. This engagement opened more than windows; new doorways beckoned.

In 1972, with the Congregation’s encouragement, I helped start NETWORK, a Catholic social justice lobby founded by Catholic Sisters.

The feminist movement was in full force, influencing NETWORK’s values: mutuality in relationships, participation in decisions, cooperation in justice work. Feminist analysis helped us detect and denounce domination in all its forms. As a balm soothing the intensity of political engagement, I took up organic gardening.

My first impression of Vatican II was that it didn’t change the Church enough! True, the altar was turned around, the Mass was in English and the nuns’ habits were modernized. And true, some anti-war and pro-civil rights talk and action was emanating from Church circles and from a few nuns at my school, but this was not enough in my view. When Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. was assassinated, we were told at Rosary High School to hold a memorial service outside because it wasn’t allowed inside. I was 17 that year when I decided to leave the Church; it seemed a bastion of irrelevance. The next 10 years I spent working in factories and obtaining a degree in fine arts. By 1977, I found myself back in Church and three years after that, entering religious life. Why?

Bible study, teachings on social justice, liturgies in English that relate, challenge and inspire—all the things missing in the ’50s Church of my early youth ended up, by the late 1970s, emerging and changing a people, a Church and my life!

Cheryl Liske, OP entered in 1980 and again in 1986 and is a community organizer with the Gamaliel Network, where she has ministered for 20 years with the interfaith community in urban areas of Michigan.
In 1975 I was invited to be on a board to examine congregational investments from a justice perspective. We developed criteria for socially responsible investing. This evolved into proactive alternative investing. Using these experiences, I designed and directed a similar fund for the Christian Brothers Investment Services, called Partners for the Common Good Loan Fund.

The next doorway opened Santuario Sisterfarm, an ecology center near San Antonio, Texas, that I co-founded with Sister Elise García and Latinas of the Borderlands. On seven acres, we created a model of living lightly on Earth using organic practices and the values of permaculture: Earth Care, People Care, and Fair Share.

I am now invited to help coordinate efforts to make our Chapter 2010 commitment “to live simply and sustainably for the sake of the whole Earth community” more visible in Lenawee County, Michigan, and to make our Motherhouse land more accessible to diverse communities, especially those struggling economically.

The various doorways I chose to walk through over the past 50 years have each led to the next, offering wider and deeper vistas; from local justice work to national public policy, from international corporate responsibility to planetary concern, from seeing God in our human neighbor to encountering Divine Mystery in all life, embraced in an expanding Universe.

Carol Coston, OP entered in 1955 and for the past 10 years has served as co-director of Santuario Sisterfarm, a sanctuary in the Texas Hill Country, cultivating biodiversity and cultural diversity.
In the mid-1960s, the Congregation was seriously taking to heart the mandates of Vatican II to renew ourselves through community and ministry. I was teaching in Sault Sainte Marie, Michigan, when Mother Genevieve Weber came to visit. I told her of my interest in nursing, which probably runs in my genes; my father was a surgeon. Mother Genevieve said she would think about it, but I never heard back. The next year, I was sent to teach in Harvey, Illinois. While there, I responded to a Congregation survey, asking how each Sister envisioned her ministry in the next five years. I again expressed my desire to go into nursing; this time I was assigned to St. Xavier University in Chicago to earn my Bachelor of Science in Nursing degree.

As an ‘older student’ in my late 20s, nursing studies were difficult, but I felt a connection with my father, enjoying my clinical rotations at Mercy Hospital where he practiced for many years. Living at Ascension Convent, I was able to attend parish gatherings exploring the spirit and philosophy of Vatican II.

In the spring of 1971, I received a call from Sister Carolyn Harrison (now deceased), administrator of Dominican Hospital in Santa Cruz, California. She invited me to minister at Dominican. As a die-hard Chicagoan, I didn’t know...
anything about the hospital, but her invitation was a pivotal point in my ministry and community life.

During my first 20 years as an obstetrical nurse at Dominican, I was inspired by my patients’ calm acceptance of difficult situations. I especially remember one patient whose son was stillborn. I prepared the baby and laid him in his mother’s arms. She held him, saying, “His name is John.” I sat with her, listening to her now lost dreams. Before leaving that day, hearing she wanted to see me, I stopped in her room. She simply asked, “Are you alright?” Her concern for me, at such a sad time in her own life, moved me.

After 13 years as patient relations manager, I now coordinate the chaplain department and our volunteer Eucharistic ministers. I know of two patients who returned to the Church because of these compassionate, caring ministers. I also coordinate the critical care and surgery volunteers, who serve families stressed by the severity of the patients’ illness or surgical procedure. They are aware of the special privilege of ministering to people who are facing critical moments in their lives. It is a privilege I have enjoyed for 40 years, thanks to our embrace of renewal, which opened the door to my nursing profession.

Veronica Kelley, OP entered in 1958. Currently serving as Chaplain Services Coordinator, she has ministered at Dominican Hospital in Santa Cruz, California, for the past 40 years.
From a perspective of 50 years, the decade of the 1960s stands out as the most disruptive and liberating years of my life. My comfortable, white, middle-class, Catholic religious Americanism was challenged by the Civil Rights Movement, the Women’s Movement, the Second Vatican Council and the Anti-Vietnam War Movement. It was a heady and often confusing time. It set me on a path in search of a more just world and a more just Church.

Two compelling images shaped my emerging consciousness in those years: “woman-spirit rising” and the Church as “people of God.” Those images contradicted my lived reality as a woman in a patriarchal world and in a patriarchal, hierarchical Church. “Woman-spirit rising” spoke to my spirit’s dormant thirst for liberation from the patriarchy that had shaped my life. The definition of Church as “people of God,” which emerged from the Second Vatican Council, empowered me to act out of that identity with a new confidence that my role in the Church was critical to its integrity and mission. Not surprisingly, my empowered woman-spirit brought me into conflict with many in my family, my community, my Church and society.

These two instincts brought many new challenges and experiences. In the renewed Church world, I worked for the 1976 U.S. Equal Rights Amendment.
The Dominican Sisters of Adrian arrived in my pueblo in 1976, when I was in high school. They rode up and down the mountains on mules, donkeys, horses and cars that dated to the 1940s, each loaded not only with all kinds of people but also with chickens, goats and other cargo. People said, “Those women look like men.” The fresh winds of change from Vatican II were reaching the central mountains of the Dominican Republic! But some things remained the same.

When I applied to study industrial arts, my request was denied because “women aren’t good in mathematics.” I had earned top honors in every senior-level math class that year! Each week I gathered with a youth group the Sisters had formed to explore, with “one hand on the Bible and the other in reality,” the connection between faith and life. These Dominican Sisters offered a new model for living and celebrating faith as Christian women, engaged in the struggles and hopes of the people of God. “I want to be like them,” I said to myself one day.

Rosa Reyes, OP entered in 1988 and has spent the past five years working in the Dominican Republic with economically poor communities of faith, especially women and immigrant workers. She is now studying social work at Barry University.

Conference of Catholic Bishops’ gathering in Detroit, moving the event to a process of open and equal consultation. The women’s issue was openly and positively debated. Two women’s ordination conferences continued to energize me to seek for changes toward inclusive language and images of God and ever-widening roles for women in the Church. I participated in a small women’s ritual group called SAS (Sisters Against Sexism) and then in Women Church Speaks. It was a wonderful time of growth.

In the larger society, the women’s/feminist movement opened new horizons for growth and engagement, from lobbying for the Equal Rights Amendment (it failed), to attending the first and only government-sponsored conference for women in Houston, to attending my first U.N. Conference on Women in Copenhagen in 1980. In the community, I served on the Women’s Commission as we grew in our understanding and participation in the whole dynamic of women moving into a new self-realization in Church and society.

At our last General Chapter that self-realization had come to full maturity as we committed ourselves “to claim our moral authority to speak our truth in Church and society in the spirit of Catherine of Siena.”

Maria Riley, OP entered in 1952; now Senior Advisor, she directed the Global Women’s Project at the Center of Concern in Washington, D.C., for 28 years.
Ah yes, October 11, 1962, was a very significant day for me, but not because it happened to be the opening day of the Second Vatican Council. That morning my mother had given birth to my brother Brian, who took his place as the youngest of 10 children. He was born after a string of six sisters, so we were all delighting in this great event, and I couldn’t wait to get to school to tell everyone.

However, when I got to Visitation High School in Chicago, all that the wonderful Sinsinawa Dominican Sisters could talk about was this historic occasion called Vatican II, which had just begun in Rome. “Who cares?” I thought, “I have a new brother!” Little did I know then how that far-away ecclesial meeting would impact my life.

With hindsight comes gratitude. Having entered in 1964, my formation years were steeped in learning about the documents of Vatican II that were rolling off the presses. Our daily “instructions” from our Novice Mistress, Sister Laurence Edward (Rosemary) Ferguson, were rich with new ideas; language; and images of God, the Church and its mission. Most importantly, we were given a new way of looking at Church and learning how the people of God were called to varied roles and responsibilities in living out their baptismal commitment. It was a new day for the laity; no more were they just expected to “pay, pray, and obey.”

Twenty years later, in 1987, I found myself beginning parish ministry at St. Margaret Mary Church in Winter Park, Florida. Since then, I have had firsthand experience of how Vatican II is implemented at the local level. In our parish, great care is taken to celebrate the liturgy well, to empower lay leadership, and to create ministries that serve the people’s needs, especially the poor who are given precedence.

The freedom Vatican II offered to explore new ways to live out our faith life also brought challenges. Questions emerged that touched the essence of what constitutes the heart of a faith community. How do we re-engage the thousands who have left the Church because of the reforms of Vatican II? Are we in loving dialogue with those who feel alienated from the Church, especially gay people, women...
and those hurt by the hierarchical structure? With fewer clergy and religious, what are we doing to ensure the continued celebration of the Eucharist and sacraments in the years ahead?

In addition to these challenges, there has developed a mindset among some parishioners that calls into question the Vatican reforms. There seems to be a church within a church, and it is up to the parish leadership to handle these differences in ways that are respectful and conciliatory, yet driven by the biblical vision of the Council that witnesses we are one Body in Christ coming together weekly to worship our Creator.

Vatican II began as an event and has become a movement that continues to be energized by the Holy Spirit. Despite the challenges and tensions, Christ’s Church will endure throughout the ages.

As St. Paul reminds us, and upon which we place our faith and hope, “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.”

Rosemary Finnegan, OP entered in 1964. She ministers as the adult faith formation director at St. Margaret Mary Parish in Winter Park, Florida, which is actively engaged in relief work in Haiti.

When I entered as a new college graduate, I didn’t know much about the Adrian Dominicans other than what I had learned at a “Come and See” weekend. Nor did I know much about their “renewal” other than the outward signs. What impressed and attracted me was how hospitable and genuine the Sisters were, their emphasis on “reading the signs of the times” and developing a personal relationship with God when it came to discerning one’s vocation and ministry. While it was evident the Sisters had a deep love and respect for the past, the focus was on the present and future—on the mission.

Excitement and energy were building as we reviewed the various drafts of a new Constitution, trying to articulate how we were called to live out our charism. I carry this forward today as a parish minister, sharing with parishioners how we are called to read the signs of the times now—how we can discern and respond to God’s distinct call to each of us.

Jeanne Wiest, OP entered in 1980; she has been the pastoral associate and liturgist at St. Peter the Fisherman Parish in Eagle River, Wisconsin, for the past 10 years.
Pope John XXIII’s metaphor for Vatican II was potent! “Open the windows! Let the fresh air in!” It sang in the hearts of the Adrian Dominican Sisters as we reflected anew on our lives in mission at our transformative Chapter in 1968. It rang in my heart as I pondered my mission as principal of our school in South Chicago where the neighborhood was rapidly changing from Caucasian to African American.

I was mindful that Vatican II acknowledged the Universal Right to an Education. “All men [and women] of every race, condition and age, since they enjoy the dignity of a human being, have an inalienable right to an education…” This reminder was most pertinent since most of us, who had previously taught only middle class, Caucasian students, were now uneasy as to how we could effectively teach young African-American women whose backgrounds and culture were so unlike our own.

We did understand that superficial adaptations would not work. The changes we faced required heart searching and a resolve to become educational missionaries in the deepest sense of the phrase. We wanted to genuinely welcome differences that were initially upsetting and often discouraging.

Workshops and communal reflection prepared us. Our hearts opened as school doors opened to welcome these eager young...
women. The fresh air they brought challenged our habitual ways of thinking and teaching. Among other things, we re-designed curricula, including history, literature and music our students would recognize; we re-thought our approach to religion to include their experiences; we adapted teaching methodologies to better address their skills and interests. As a result, instruction became more interactive and thus livelier.

We learned from our students. They taught us that hardship and pain are eased with laughter; that their language, though not always grammatically correct, was sprinkled with vivid expressions. One freshman told me she was so happy that her toes danced! Their customs and preferences gradually transformed school activities and celebrations so that they were indeed multicultural.

Vatican II set forth the principle; students and faculty verified its truth that we are better people when we move out of our cultural safety zones to mingle with and learn from one another. This experience brought both students and faculty to an appreciation of all people as God’s children, as our sisters and brothers.

Jean Denomme, OP entered in 1949. In retirement, she continues her mission of teaching through writing, including a new book titled, Where Is This God of Yours? (2010).

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1974 Aquinas Dominican High School graduating class, Chicago
When I received my assignment in 1969 to teach at a parish grade school in Callao, Peru, I entered into an effervescent ecclesial environment. The people of Peru with their rich ancient civilization rapidly captured my heart. The Latin American response to the Second Vatican Council had come into focus in 1968 at the Bishops Conference in Medellín, Colombia. Many of us who served south of our country were surprised to discover how the Medellín documents provided a framework and impetus for life and mission with the people of God—our pueblo, the vast majorities of whom were poor and downtrodden. We felt challenged to strive for human dignity for all, and to alleviate situations of injustice.

Throughout the 1970s, thousands of us in pastoral ministry attended summer schools of theology at the Catholic University in Lima and participated in workshops on forming Base Christian Communities. We pondered the context of our realities and sought ways to engage as Church in respectful dialogue, sharing life with our people. Never before had I felt more called to embrace discipleship with greater integrity. I learned to interpret the Gospel from the underside of society.

My teaching expanded into several forms of pastoral work. The bishop charged me with fostering the formation of Base Christian Communities throughout the diocese. I provided guidance and

My first memory of Church: I am a little girl, excited that my Dad is taking me to a “guitar Mass.” As a six-year-old, I associated this music with a joyful experience of God. I vividly remember studying the Bible and experiencing Jesus as a friend and a brother. The word of God related directly to my life. I later learned that worshipping with this music, reading Scripture, and focusing on a relationship with Jesus are signs of the implementation of Vatican II. For me, however, they weren’t signs of renewal—they were how I first came to the faith. This relational faith led me to a deeper love of God and a call to serve God’s people, especially in different cultures. Before entering the Congregation, I was a lay missionary in Bolivia, living in a barrio, teaching literacy, working with a Christian women’s cooperative and helping to coordinate the family catechism program, which led to the formation of a Base Christian Community. I am thrilled now to use the Spanish I learned to share that love of God as I walk with the immigrant Hispanic community in Anchorage.

This relational faith led me to a deeper love of God and a call to serve God’s people...

Lorraine Reaume, OP entered in 1997. A native of Canada, she currently serves as a pastoral associate at Our Lady of Guadalupe Church in Anchorage, Alaska.
formation to students at a large public high school. I lived in a new “young town” (a slum), worked in a factory and engaged with the people in our barrio to address basic needs, like water and electricity. Many agonies and ecstasies accompanied these experiences, but the joy and satisfaction of solidarity and new learning endure to this day. This was a point of no return for me.

At our 1973 Mission Congress, Sisters missioned in Latin America gathered with our elected Vicaress in the governmental unit then called Adrian Dominican Latin American Missions (ADLAM). Reviewing our life in mission, we came to the pivotal decision of making an option for the poor. Sisters in the Dominican Republic and Puerto Rico called this “an era of risk-taking, letting go, shadow and light.” Indeed this was our experience at all levels! We have continued to minister in a more conservative ecclesial and socio-political climate. We have dealt with polarization among our members, given different perspectives and spiritualities. Although now fewer in number, we strive to remain faithful to the preaching of the Gospel, rooted in the lives and struggles of the people.

Rose Ann Schlitt, OP entered in 1954 and served for 42 years in Latin American missions, including Nicaragua, Puerto Rico, the Dominican Republic and Mexico. After directing Dominican Volunteers International in Rome, she is missioned to the Philippines.

Sister Rose Ann Schlitt with the Ortiz family in Nicaragua
Vatican II was one of many waves of change that swept our world during the 1960s. The civil rights, women’s rights and youth movements also created an environment in which change seemed to be the only constant. “God is Dead,” proclaimed the covers of *Time* and *Newsweek*. Many of us started to wonder what kind of God was running the show when, in a matter of a few months, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and Senator Robert F. Kennedy were assassinated, our cities burned, and violent confrontations erupted on the streets of Chicago and other major cities.

Thanks to my undergrad years at Loyola University Chicago, my faith did not fail during these first rounds of questioning. Eight semesters of theology and six of philosophy seemed excessive, but by the time I graduated just days after Robert Kennedy’s assassination, I had come to appreciate how those courses strengthened my faith, enabling me to hold on while many of my generation turned away.

A later test of it came, in part, as a reaction to Vatican II liturgical innovations. My father’s funeral occurred during that brief period when the Mass of the Resurrection was far too triumphal. With its white vestments and joyful music, it offered no comfort because it moved straight to Easter with no recognition of the reality of death. While intellectual sparring had served my faith when I dealt with broader questions during the late ’60s, the “what kind of God” refrain about my father’s illness and death echoed for a few years. It was finally silenced when I viewed Martin Sheen playing the challenged abbot in the televised version of Brian Moore’s *Catholics* in 1973. Eyes of faith forced my heart to recognize that my lips still moved in prayer.

![Realizing Deep Connections](Image)

The openings of Vatican II were a grace of the Holy Spirit through which we could appreciate God’s love, generosity, and greatness. Parishioners in the Dominican Republic who previously took part timidly in religious celebrations now had the opportunity to participate in workshops and Bible studies, learning more about the life of Jesus and his project to bring about the reign of God. Before Vatican II, religious for us were people with whom we could barely speak and then only about things strictly related to education or religion. How wonderful when they could draw near, becoming our friends, confidantes and counselors! One of the great benefits of the Second Vatican Council was the creation of programs like the Hospital Volunteers, which have helped bring about a social culture that is more sensitive to the suffering and marginalized and to values of life and wellbeing.

Mary Morros is a native of the Dominican Republic and a longtime volunteer, serving the sick and needy of her country. She became an Adrian Dominican Associate in 2007.
while the abbot’s lips remained paralyzed.

The postconciliar Church I reengaged with was much more welcoming than that of my youth. I became involved with the Chicago Conference of the Laity, Call to Action and Chicago Catholic Women. Ultimately, my journey wound back to Adrian. As a result of Vatican II, Adrian, like my parish, was much more open. Realizing the deep connections forged during my brief time there, I became an Associate just a few years after beginning my teaching ministry at Regina Dominican High School.

Teaching literature through the lens of faith for 40 years has been a joy—a joy renewed each morning as I make my way up Chicago’s lakefront, the place of my soul’s “fair seed time.”

Kathleen Burke. Ph.D. entered in 1964 and left six months later. She became an Associate in 1993, and has taught at Regina Dominican since 1985.

I was six years old when Pope John XXIII convened the Second Vatican Council in 1962 and in the fourth grade at its closing by Pope Paul IV in 1965. I grew up when many Americans and American Catholics were calling for peace and justice and an awareness of the unequal rights of women. Now, a half-century later, many of the promises of Vatican II remain unfulfilled. I chose to be an Associate of the Dominican Sisters of Edmonds, and now of Adrian, because the community brings a spirit of veritas to the continuing mission of seeking justice and advocating for peace in our world.

American Catholics were calling for peace and justice

Human rights are held sacred by the Dominicans; no one is expected to accept conditions of oppression or violence. Even in the most overwhelmingly hopeless of situations, the power of prayer and the steadfastness of presence to suffering is the Dominican charism, one that continues to inspire me to live a life founded on Gospel values.

Kathleen Shannon Dorcy. Ph.D. became an Associate of the Dominican Sisters of Edmonds in 2000. She serves as a nurse scientist at Fred Hutchison Cancer Research Center/Seattle Cancer Care Alliance and teaches at the University of Washington, Tacoma.
Since the Chapter of Renewal in 1968, the Adrian Dominican Sisters have held eight General Chapters to elect leadership and set the course for the coming years. These summaries of each General Chapter and the enactments that emerged to further the mission and vision of the Congregation give a sense of the unfolding movement of the Spirit, sparked by renewal.

1974
The delegates established a process for the community to educate itself on social justice as a Gospel mandate and to evaluate ministries, institutions and investments in light of that mandate. Sisters were called to “a new sense of mission, a new focus of our energies, to a thrust outward in responsive service to afflicted people.”

1978
The Chapter reorganized the Congregational government into an interim system. Delegates
developed a Mission Statement, linking our mission with that of Jesus, to “share faith and life with one another” and to “be with others bearers and recipients of his love, co-creators of his justice and peace.”

1982
The current government structure of Mission Chapters and Mission Groups was established. Members were called to the task of “scrutinizing the signs of the times” and opening themselves to the perspective of Jesus. Specifically, they were to “confront and strive to transform those systems that dehumanize, exploit and destroy” and devote themselves to serving the victims of those systems.

1986
Personal and communal transformation was the theme to allow Sisters to “release the energy among us for the sake of the mission.” Numerous committees and commissions were established to further the mission, including one on women. In addition, the delegates endorsed the sanctuary movement and condemned Apartheid and racism.

1992
In an elaborate, three-part Chapter that began in 1990, the Adrian Dominicans resolved to “preach and to help shape a community among ourselves and in our world that witnesses to the healing, liberating and empowering truth of God’s design.” The delegates set forth action directives for each of their Vision Statements on community/Dominican charism, the poor, race, and women.

1998
The General Chapter affirmed the 1992 Vision Statements and added a fifth focus: ecology. “As gifted dwellers of the planet...we commit ourselves to the healing of our planet by fostering right relationships, and by confronting the destruction of life forms.”

2004
In the first General Chapter of the new millennium, all members were able for the first time to nominate themselves to serve as Chapter delegates. The delegates wrote and approved a stirring Vision: “We Dominican Preachers of Adrian, impelled by the Gospel and outraged by the injustices of our day, seek truth; make peace; reverence life.” Members were further called upon to confront racist attitudes and practices, as well as systems that deny freedom and equality to women.

2010
Affirming the Vision of 2004, the 2010 delegates crafted four specific commitments for the Congregation and individual members: to live simply and sustainably; to study emerging worldviews and theologies; to open our hearts and deepen understanding of diverse cultures and beliefs; and to claim the moral authority to speak truth in Church and in society.

Barbara Kelley, OP entered in 1996; she serves in the Communications and Technology Department of the Congregation, primarily as a writer and editor.
Vatican II, thank you for bringing us the Good News in the most human, spiritual way!

Seemingly, from out of nowhere came rather small volumes of new teachings from Vatican II. These changed our lives. The new understanding of Church and of each of us in it as a people of God was probed more deeply in its faith and witness orientation.

The documents were written in a current language, setting forth a profound understanding that the hopes and griefs of our times were truly our own. Religious were asked to hold a special Chapter of Renewal. We spent three summers in dialogue working toward a more practical way of living out the truths of our faith in a time when the world and its needs were rapidly changing. Though three years seemed long, in retrospect, that dialogue became the cornerstone of how we were to meet the changing needs of our world and the new culture that was upon us.

We knew the bishops of the world were meeting in Rome, but did we really imagine that out of their deliberations would come such resounding energy and excitement? How would we have known or guessed that we, the people of God, had not alone the right but the obligation of seeking truth and justice, and were, moreover, obliged in conscience to speak our truth in season and out of season?

All of a sudden we found ourselves experiencing a deeper understanding of what it meant to belong to and participate with heart, mind and voice as the people of God. Nowhere was our place, that call, stated more emphatically than in the powerful assertions of Dignitatis Humanae:

A sense of the dignity of the human person has been impressing itself more and more deeply in the consciousness of contemporary man [and woman], and the demand is increasingly made that men [and women] should act on their own judgment, enjoying and making use of a responsible freedom…. [in] the quest for the values proper to the human spirit….in accord with truth and justice.

Thankfully, we were inundated with a mass of information—books, articles, speakers, conferences, programs, learnings and dialogue—all based on “The Documents.” Theologians and their writings came to life from out of everywhere! Feminism, its truth and meaning for us, was a movement that became part of our lives during renewal. As women, we had support from the documents as “human beings” but not specifically as women. Rome’s 1965 language and profound teachings were still spoken through the masculine voice.

Our General Chapter of Renewal mandated a three-year summer program in theology for our Sisters.
Siena Heights College brought theologians from Europe, together with women and men with expertise in related fields to engage our Sisters in this dialogue. We needed to understand the Vatican II Church for we were missioned throughout the United States, Latin America, the Caribbean and Africa, and were the voice of Vatican II in our relationships with our people.

During this time, American culture was experiencing a chaotic change. Those entering our Congregation were coming out of that same culture and mind. The “regular life” of the former more monastic life style was giving way to new practices, which created conflict with some members of the community. We were not free from the exigencies of change. Change was the new normal of that time and most likely will be a constant into our future.

In reflecting upon the significant changes we underwent, I am in awe of the unique way each woman pursued the truth of her life: searching within herself as an individual and as a member of the Adrian Dominican community, searching out her professional choices and struggling toward a spirituality that would be in harmony with herself and the Congregation. A renewed theology brought about new pursuits in spirituality and that search is more alive today than ever. Attention to the new cosmology, Earth consciousness, changing worldviews, and human aspirations for the common good create new expressions of prayer and contemplation. Our search for a personal and communal depth of spirituality is as critical today—and shall remain so always.

I believe that deep within the Adrian Dominican charism, our foremothers and the Spirit that moved them to believe indomitably in the women and our mission as Community, is the same call deep within each of us today—urging us to ask the new questions and to be faithful in that search. We know far less about the future and what we may be called to in the years ahead. Our Chapters since the renewal of Vatican II have called us to faithful witness endlessly—to pursue truth and preach it with courage and love. In the year 2011, these are not idle words or pious sentiments. This commitment to speak truth may come at a price we could not have imagined, but we are obliged to speak! We will hear. We will be guided by our consciences and with trust in one another. We are graced women and are comforted in being led by the limitless love of God in our hearts. Gerard Manley Hopkins, in a former age, spoke our hearts’ desires just so:

\[
\text{Oh, morning, at the brown brink eastward springs—}
\]

\[
\text{Because the Holy Ghost over the bent}
\]

\[
\text{World broods with warm breast and with ah! bright wings.}
\]

Rosemary J. Ferguson, OP entered in 1943. She led the Congregation through its renewal, serving as Prioress from 1968 to 1978.
Caught by the Spirit Today

Sharing life with the Dominican Sisters of Adrian is a way for me to live my faith and relationship with God immersed in both prayer and the reality of our world. It is a place where I can grow spiritually and personally. Becoming an Adrian Dominican for me is more than just an option; it is a blessing.

Joaquina Pacheco-Villar (Candidate) entered in 2010 from her home in the Dominican Republic where she served as a psychologist. She was an Associate for five years prior to entering.

The commitment of the Adrian Dominican Sisters to follow in the mission of Jesus as co-creators of his justice and peace resonated with my desire to do the same. I value their independence, immense courage and authenticity; a group of women who give voice to their own challenging questions as they build transparent structures in the spirit of shared decision-making.

Sister Adela Langa (Novice, right), a native of Romania, entered in 2010 from her adopted home of Bowling Green, Ohio, where she served as a university writing specialist.

What initially drew me to the Adrian Dominican Congregation was the compelling language of the Vision to seek truth, make peace, and reverence life. It both inspired and challenged me. I also was attracted to the fact that the Sisters are equally a strong, interdependent community and free to be themselves in the way that God calls them as individuals.

Sister Erin Muldoon (Novice, left) entered in 2009 from Nashville, Tennessee, where she worked as a marine biologist.

I was not at all interested in religious life until I met the Dominican Sisters of Adrian. The Sisters I knew seemed closed and never smiled. In the Adrian Dominicans I saw Sisters who were full of love and joy, women who worked for justice and peace—and who danced! When I started praying with them, I began to feel a call.

Sister Xiomara Méndez-Hernández (Novice) entered in 2008 from her home in the Dominican Republic where she had her own business in and taught fashion design. She was an Associate for three years prior to entering.
When I was in prayer about entering religious life, I wondered how I would fit in. I was a woman who believed in the mission of Jesus—all were created equal and called to work together for the betterment of all creation. As I researched different religious congregations, I opened the Adrian Dominican website to our Mission Statement. When I read it, I knew I was home.

Mary Jones, OP (Temporary Professed) entered in 2004 from Dearborn, Michigan, where she served in the Material Planning and Logistics Department of the Ford Company.

I entered the Congregation because I felt called to religious life, to giving my entire life to Christ. I was attracted to the Adrian Dominican Sisters first of all by the spirit and warmth of the Sisters I met in Albuquerque and during a three-month “Adrian Experience.” The Dominican charism of preaching the Word of God draws me. I preach as a nurse practitioner, always aware that healing was one of the primary ways that Jesus demonstrated God’s love.

Jacqueline Stoll, OP (Temporary Professed) entered in 2004 from Albuquerque, New Mexico, where she served as a nurse practitioner.