In the spirit of Catherine of Siena
Dear Sisters, Associates, and Friends:

In this issue of Voices, we continue the exploration we began last summer of the Commitments we made as a Congregation during our 2010 General Chapter. In the Summer 2012 issue of Voices, we focused on our Commitment “to open our hearts to the other and deepen our understanding of diverse cultures and beliefs.” With this issue, we examine what it means to commit ourselves to “claim our moral authority to speak truth in Church and society in the spirit of Catherine of Siena.”

In the opening essay, Sister Anneliese Sinnott speaks to the theological grounding in conscience of this Commitment, raising a number of the challenges we face in striving to live out the mandate. Sister Maria Riley explores the implications of our making this claim as women in the context of patriarchal conditioning where women’s moral agency was unrecognized in Church and society for centuries. Sister Nadine Foley provides historical background on the Constitution’s statement on the authority of the Adrian Dominican Congregation. And in an interview conducted by Sister Barbara Kelley, Dominican Sister of Peace Mary Catherine Hilkert, author of *Speaking with Authority: Catherine of Siena and the Voices of Women Today*, shares with us her views on what it means to make this Commitment “in the spirit of Catherine of Siena.”

These contributions are complemented by a sampling of first-person stories told by several members, including Sisters Mary Ann Dixon, Janice Holkup, Jean Hughes, Margaret Karam, Joyce Caulfield, and Pat Spangler, who share the challenges of living out the Commitment. Sisters Christine Matthews, Maria Romero, and Rose Ann Schlitt point out how many of us live this Commitment each day through our actions and choices, and by encouraging others. Reflection questions at the end provoke further thought for us to ponder personally and/or with one another. Our cover image, the magnificent Catherine tapestry, created by Sisters Barbara Chenicek and Rita Schiltz, is a powerful meditation unto itself.

As we consider the needs of our day and the truths that are crying out to be heard in our world, this Commitment to speak truth, perhaps more than any other, goes to the heart of our Dominican charism. To what edges of Church and society is Dominic calling us today and into the future? What, if anything, is holding us back?

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COVER: The Catherine Tapestry, created by Sisters Barbara Chenicek and Rita Schiltz of INAI Studio, captures Catherine of Siena at the moment that she is “taken hold of, seized by the Spirit, impelled to go beyond the skies of Siena, to be the Word she is called to be.” The 6’ 7” x 16’ 8” tapestry was installed in St. Catherine Chapel in Adrian in August 2009.

Cover image and design: INAI Studios. Cover photo: Ray Casey

Reflecting our ecological concerns, this publication is printed with soy inks on 100% post-consumer recycled paper, processed chlorine-free, and made with renewable energy.
At the General Chapter of 2010 we proclaimed: “We commit to claim our moral authority to speak truth in Church and society in the spirit of Catherine of Siena.”

This is not our first attempt as a Congregation to claim for ourselves the right and the duty to speak truth to those who need to hear it. Since we embarked on our Chapter of Renewal in 1968, we have declared that the purpose of our lives is to be about the mission of Jesus. We did not arrive at this conclusion entirely on our own, but took our impetus from Vatican II, which told us in *Lumen Gentium* that, as the People of God, we are inheritors of the mission of Jesus (#5). In our rediscovery of Dominic and his vision, mandated by that same Council, we began to claim our role as Dominicans as the prophetic “arm” of the Church. Our task, we came to realize, is to preach the mission of Jesus wherever and to whomever it is needed.

And so, as we revised our Constitution and Statutes, we said, “We Adrian Dominicans claim the apostolic spirit of our founder, Dominic … so that we too might speak the Gospel word in the transforming power of the Spirit according to the needs of our time” (#6).

At the General Chapter of 1992 we called on ourselves “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.”

These challenges from our various General Chapters did not come easily. Even though Vatican II affirmed for all Christians the validity of their own experience, we had to learn to trust not only in our own experience but also in one another and in each other’s experience. We had to grow in our ability to “preach truth.” We had to become convinced that God’s compassionate love for all people is the truth that would set people free. We had to become convinced that we could make valuable contributions to both the Church and the world around us.

**Theological Grounding in Conscience**

What is the theological basis for our claim to this mandate? How do we arrive at “truth”? How can we be sure that our “moral authority” is on the right track? How can we know that what we think and believe and preach is actually “of God”?

Vatican II tells us that our conscience is our deepest and best guide (*Gaudium et Spes*, #16). Following our consciences is not just an option; it is the way God has called us to live. The documents of Vatican II affirm this belief in several places. However, we must engage authentically in the formation of that conscience. We must listen to all the voices.
in our world: Church teaching, theology, the sciences, the “people in the trenches.” As we do so, we keep growing into new insights and new ways of being. As we become aware of new “truths,” we learn to speak in new ways; we become more deeply convinced of what is, for us, truth. We learn to speak our truth, even when it conflicts with what is offered as “official” teaching, be that from the Church or the government.

**Challenge**

Whether we call our mandate “speaking truth” or “claiming our moral authority,” the words we have spoken as a Congregation commit us to speaking truth wherever and whenever it is needed. Why, then, are we sometimes hesitant to do this?

What are the elephants in our room? Are we afraid of a backlash from the official Church? Is it our concern for one another? Are we embarrassed to be called “bad nuns” by some in the hierarchy? Is our understanding of Church too paternalistic? Are we just plain tired of getting nowhere? Are we most concerned about bringing harm to the Congregation? Do we simply lack confidence in thinking we know truth?

Today, we are challenged to see ourselves as participants in a global world. The challenge of global awareness forces us to expand our search for truth beyond the boundaries of our own nation, especially those of us in the United States. We must become aware of other contexts, other cultures, other mindsets, other worldviews, allowing them to impact our own. We need to ask ourselves: How global are we? What do we read that stretches us beyond our borders? Do we access any sources of world news from beyond our borders? Do we ever engage in conversations that broaden our perspectives? What do we really know about the global and planetary reality of which we are a part? How do we undertake the task of broadening our own horizons to include other cultures, other worldviews, other theologies, other cosmologies?

Truth often becomes clearer when viewed from the underside of human history. Evil, oppression, and suffering have a way of exposing truth in all its starkness. Systems of dominance such as racism, classism and sexism frequently help us to uncover the root causes of untruth. The search for truth requires compassion, openness to pain and anger, and constant conversion, especially on the part of those of us who belong to the privileged of the world. Are we willing to allow ourselves to be exposed to the dark sides of our world “that privilege some, dehumanize others, and ravage Earth” (Adrian Dominican Vision 2004)? Where do we stand on difficult issues, and why?

As Dominicans, we claim “truth” as our motto. We are not the only seekers of truth in the world, but we are preachers of truth as well. By preaching truth, we make visible our commitment to mission. Our task as Christians—and specifically as Dominicans—is to do for our world what Jesus did for his world: proclaim the good news, lead people to truth, and participate in bringing about the Reign of God through ministry to others.

Continued next page
Peter Phan, a systematic theologian who teaches at Catholic University, identifies Jesus as a border-crosser. A border or boundary is drawn to keep someone or something out. Donald Senior, professor of New Testament at Catholic Theological Union, describes Jesus as one who simply did not see boundaries. When someone drew a line in the sand to keep others out, Jesus erased the lines. Boundaries can sometimes keep out truth.

We need to continue to “seek truth” in our world, but also in our Church today. This seems to be a special challenge to us. What we have understood now for almost 50 years to be the truth contained in the documents of the Second Vatican Council seems to be, at times, undermined by some in the Vatican. Our Church struggles with a multitude of problems. The sexual abuse scandal, the move toward more conservatism, the shortage of priests, and other problems have all taken their toll. Many people are leaving the Church or joining alternative churches. As Dominicans, especially, we recognize the mandate to speak truth. How do we do that in a divided Church? Which are the voices that have been excluded from official conversations about Christian or Catholic theology?

Our Church today faces a struggle between what Timothy Radcliffe, OP, former Master of the Dominican Order, calls “Communion Catholics,” those who are most concerned about the inner life of the Church, including rules and regulations, and “Kingdom Catholics,” those who are focused on the many ills of our society. Many of the issues with which people grapple today—immigration, life in all its stages, poverty, fair wages, war, sexuality, and sexual identity—are also often the dividing issues in our Church. Amid these tensions in the Church today, we ask, where is truth? Is there truth on both sides of the divisions? What is the truth to which we as Dominicans are called?

Yves Congar, OP, a French Dominican scholar who attended the Second Vatican Council, said that in order to hold on to our past and still move into the future we must think of “walking.” I can’t walk without one foot in the past and one foot in the future. I think, perhaps, that’s what Timothy is calling us to. We must find ways to keep one foot in the tradition and one foot moving ahead into the future while being faithful to truth.

We have claimed for ourselves the identity of “preacher,” but we also recognize that, to preach truth, we must also be learners and listeners, willing to enter into dialogue. Our challenge for this kind of preaching is to learn from the perspective of the “outsiders,” to see with those living on the margins of our world the full revelation of God. If we do our preaching this way, it will be not so much a reform but a reorientation. This is our role as Dominican leaders and as disciples. This is our task: to preach truth! And that is the role of the prophet!

Chrys Geraets, OP, has challenged us as Dominicans: “The prophetic word must be sounded throughout the world that people might have hope when there is no hope, that they might see light when all is dark and that they might repent so that the new can be born out of all this dying.”

To be Dominican, then, is to search for truth; to listen to the voices all over our global world, including the Church but not excluding the wider world; to ask the questions that need to be asked; to bring these questions to contemplation and prayer; and to allow oneself to be impacted and changed so that one will think differently, act differently, speak differently, and be different. Are we willing to do this? That is the challenge of claiming our moral authority.

Sister Anneliese Sinnott is a professor of systematic theology and the director of the Master of Arts program at Ecumenical Theological Seminary in Detroit.
Owing our Moral Agency as Women

Maria Riley, OP

Ambiguity has clouded the issue of women’s moral agency and authority since the beginning of the Christian era, both in the Church and in society.*

Paul writes in his Epistle to the Galatians, “There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus” (3:28). But in Paul’s First Epistle to Timothy, he states unequivocally: “Let a woman learn in silence with full submission. I permit no woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she is to keep silent. For Adam was formed first, then Eve: and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor. Yet she will be saved through childbearing” (2:11-15).

Paul’s second admonition has had more impact on social and ecclesial practice down the years than his first.

While social and cultural norms may have differed in various societies, women carried the burden of such inequality through the centuries. As late as the 19th and into the 20th century, women were denied the right to vote or to be a representative in governments; they lacked civil and property rights and rights within the marital contract and equal economic, social, and professional opportunities.

Women have not been passive in the face of these inequalities, as the historical recurrence of women’s movements over the centuries attests. Likewise, over the ages, extraordinary women have risen above these restrictions. Women such as Catherine of Siena, Hildegard of Bingen, Catherine the Great of Russia and Queen Elizabeth I of England challenged the limitations Church and society placed on women’s personhood and agency.

These efforts have not been in vain, as today we witness the number of women and societies committed to advancing women’s human rights and their active participation in all sectors of social, economic, political, and educational life. One of the most important contributions of the current feminist movement has been to establish a solid theological, ethical, philosophical, and sociological foundation in support of women’s historical struggle to assume their full humanity and rights. Critical to this work has been the turn to women’s experience as a basis of analysis, particularly their experiences of oppression and alienation.

For example, by incorporating women’s dignity and rights, their full personhood, as central to moral reasoning, feminist ethics not only recognized women’s moral agency but also changed the scope and process of religious social ethics. “Moral agency means that the persons have the capacity to make sense of themselves as creatures who act ‘morally,’ that is to discern actions, consider implications, be held responsible for one’s actions and choices and act on the values one hopes to embody” (Legge, 2006).

However, it has not always been easy for women to claim their moral agency and moral authority. Resistance of existing authority structures, social mores, tradition,
cultural values, and political and economic barriers have inhibited women as they have sought to move beyond the boundaries that had been set for them. We need only to think about the role of nurses in relation to male doctors, the first women to enter medical or law school, women in corporations and women in the Church. Even today, the instances of women on corporate boards or as heads of corporations still tend to be the exception rather than the rule.

Women themselves have too often internalized the message of their inferiority. For years, the socialization and formation of young women has been to be obedient and compliant. Lacking confidence and even awareness of themselves as moral agents, women are often fearful of breaking the barriers that restrain the full realization of their personhood and rights, both in the social order and in the Church.

Maturing into the knowledge and confidence of one’s moral agency and authority is a process. Our experience as Adrian Dominicans is a good example of assuming both our personal and communal agency and authority.

The Second Vatican Council and our General Chapter of Renewal in the 1960s precipitated a major break with past structures of obedience in the search for structures that were more expressive of who we are as mature women of faith. We moved from the superior as decision-maker, even in the minor details of living, to structures of collegiality and participation in the governance of our local communities and of the Congregation.

“...women are often fearful of breaking the barriers that restrain the full realization of their personhood and rights, both in the social order and in the Church.”

In the writing of our new Constitution, based on our experience and the deliberations of the General Chapter, the section on “Organization for Mission” defines this new understanding of obedience:

From Jesus, proclaimed in the Gospel, the authority of the Adrian Dominican Congregation, mediated and affirmed through the Church, resides in the communion of its members according to their respective roles as given in this Constitution and Statutes (3).

The phrase “mediated and affirmed through the Church” was added to the text during the process of seeking approval of the Constitutions from Rome (see article on page 12). This statement illustrates the subtle shifting of the foundation of the Congregation’s moral authority from the members to the hierarchy. The final section, “The Authority of the Constitution,” is more direct: “The approval of the Constitution by the Holy See unites the Adrian Dominican Congregation and its individual members in fidelity to papal authority” (#21).

In the process of owning our authority as a Congregation, we made several important symbolic changes. Traditionally, we had always invited the local bishop to preside over the installation of newly elected Prioresses and their Councils. Recognizing that it was our appropriate role as a Congregation to install our leaders, we ceased to invite a bishop to recognize their leadership. Likewise, we ceased inviting a bishop to receive new candidates into the Novitiate and hear Sisters’ first vows.

During this period, the issue of dissent arose, both individual dissent and communal dissent. Under the title “Taking a Stand” in the Congregation Policies and Procedures Handbook, the process for taking a stand of dissent is carefully worded but open to personal moral agency. If the Catholic Church has an official stance on the issue, the directives state:

The Congregation is an entity within the Roman Catholic Church, a relationship that is affirmed in our current Constitution and Statutes. Therefore, it is a serious matter when the Congregation, or an individual sister, wishes to take a position in opposition to the Church teaching.

If through study and experience it becomes evident that current
doctrine is in need of revision, we need to find ways, challenging as they may seem to be, to add our study and experience to the body of Church teaching on the subject. There are a variety of ways to act: writing, preaching, teaching and dialogue with other members of the Church.

The individual Sister who wishes to speak out on issues where the Congregation has no clear stance will have to weigh the consequences. If she decides to take a stance, she does so without the support of the Congregation. Before making such a decision, a Sister ought to discuss the matter with her Chapter Prioress (N1 ff).

It is striking how these directives repeat the characteristics of “moral person”: the context of experience, discernment (study and dialogue), consideration of the implications (consequences) and being held responsible for choices and actions.

These experiences are not unique to the Adrian Dominicans; they are examples of many women’s congregations. Witness the canonical Visitations of women’s congregations in the United States four years ago. We are still awaiting the judgment of Rome on our renewal processes. Currently, the Leadership Conference of Women Religious has been placed under the authority of three bishops who have the mandate to examine and direct its conference materials and speakers and to correct its by-laws. The decree stated concerns on doctrinal matters and certain unspecified “radical feminist” influences. One of the first actions of newly elected Pope Francis was to affirm this position. At issue in these events is the hierarchy’s persistent position that women’s moral agency and moral authority are not to be trusted.

In the light of these considerations and history, the Adrian Dominican commitment from the 2010 General Chapter is relevant and timely: “We commit to claim our moral authority to speak truth in Church and society in the spirit of Catherine of Siena.”

Sister Maria Riley served for more than 30 years at the Center of Concern, researching and writing about women’s human rights and their moral agency.

References

Reflections on Men/Man-male/ Woman-female
by Janice Holkup, OP

This poem is an almost verbatim memory of an interchange I had in the 1970s with a priest giving a class on how to be lectors, when I/we questioned whether we could change masculine words into gender neutral, and he said we could not alter the word of God. He was annoyed by the request, giving it no credence.

I stand naked before the mirror— My image reflected back to me. “Christ died to save all men.” I am saved. Men means all.

“Only men can be ordained.” Now I am woman-female. Men means male.
I study my reflection/image carefully.
Nothing has changed. Now I am male; now I am female. How can this be? I am confused. Who decides?

God said “Let us make man in our image and likeness.” I am man? I am woman? Who am I? Who decides?
What are the criteria?
Have faith. Have faith? In what? In whom? Myself?
Myself!

Sister Janice Holkup teaches art at North Beach Elementary School in Seattle and is a Justice and Peace Promoter for the Congregation.
“Preach the Gospel at all times, if necessary use words.” Following the dictum attributed to St. Francis of Assisi, we more often live out our Commitment to speak truth in Church and society through our actions rather than our words.

Can you see yourself in one or more of the following?

Sister Christine Matthews, a member of the General Council from 1992 to 1998, serves in Alumni Relations at Siena Heights University.

What would you add to this list?

- Participating in a peace march or praying for peace
- Visiting an inmate in prison
- Protesting war or the manufacture of weapons
- Working against human trafficking
- Attending share-holders’ meetings
- Participating in anti-racism work
- Doing community organizing
- Working in a soup kitchen or making meals for needy school children
- Providing shelter for the homeless
- Writing to elected representatives, newspaper editors, or corporate leaders
- Praying the rosary in solidarity with those who stand up for immigrants
- Providing mental, spiritual, or physical healthcare to those in need
- Supporting workers through boycotts or in picket lines
- Raising ecological consciousness
- Tutoring in a literacy program or teaching at-risk youth
- Serving on the staff or boards of organizations helping those most in need
Helping Others Claim their Moral Authority

Maria Romero, OP

I have witnessed people in my parish grow in faith and Christian action after taking part in various faith formation processes or parish programs. When this happens, and they express a real interest in ministry and addressing social issues, I encourage them to step forward and embrace the various ministries they have chosen. I am sure that this experience rings true for many of our Sisters and Associates who work in parishes or retreat centers where we claim moral authority by cultivating and encouraging its expression in others.

Sister Maria Romero is the pastoral associate at San Carlos Cathedral in Monterey, California.

Standing with the Most Needy

Rose Ann Schlitt, OP

A significant number of our Sisters and Associates have claimed their moral authority by following the promptings of the Holy Spirit to accompany and stand—day after day—with the neediest of the people of God. Our women immerse themselves body and spirit in companioning and serving victims of injustice and those who are excluded, marginalized, poor, abandoned, at-risk, and imprisoned. In many places in the United States and overseas, they speak truth by their very lives, both in the Church and to the Church, in society and to society—very much in the spirit of St. Catherine of Siena.

Sister Rose Ann Schlitt served in cross-cultural ministry for 50 years in Puerto Rico, the Dominican Republic, Peru, Nicaragua, Mexico, Italy and the Philippines.
The Authority of the Adrian Dominican Congregation

Nadine Foley, OP

“From Jesus, proclaimed in the Gospel, the authority of the Adrian Dominican Congregation, mediated and affirmed through the Church, resides in the communion of its members according to their respective roles as given in this Constitution and Statutes” (Constitution, #20).

This statement, as it appears in our Adrian Dominican Constitution and Statutes, has a history all of its own. Initially, as we worked on the section on governance, it was a much simpler statement. I remember writing it: “The authority of the Adrian Dominican Congregation lies in the communion of its members.” The concept grew out of my reflections on religious life and its place within the Church. The Dogmatic Constitution on the Church defined the Church as composed of bishops, clergy, and laity. There was no distinct reference to those in religious life, so it followed that we were contained within the ranks of the laity. In the chapter on the laity, however, there was a definition of the laity as “all the faithful except those in Holy Orders and those who belong to a religious state approved by the Church” (#31).

Quite clearly, we had no place within the hierarchical ordering.

My attention then turned to religious life as a charismatic for the Church. In the document on religious life from Vatican Council II we read: “The charismatic of religious life, far from being an impulse born of ‘flesh and blood,’ or one derived from a mentality which conforms itself to the modern world, is the fruit of the Holy Spirit, who is always at work within the Church” (Evangelica testificatio, 11).

The line on authority in our proposed Constitution became disputed when we met with a committee of the Congregation for Religious in the Vatican. We realized that our affiliation with the official Church needed clarification. Our reference point was Dominic. While he saw the need for his Order of Preachers, he also saw the need for a clear affiliation with the Church if his friars were to have credibility as they carried out their mission. The result of our reflection was the line “mediated and affirmed by the Church.” While this did not fully satisfy the reviewing committee, we did not wish to back down from our claim to having an inner authority of our own.

In one rather contentious meeting with the committee, I said, “We must have some authority. We elect our own leaders.” To this, Sister Mary Linscott, SNDdeN, replied, “Sister, you have the right to elect your own leaders, but you don’t have the authority to do so.” This reply seemed very strange to me. In fairness to Sister Mary, however, I believe that she regarded the Pope as having ultimate authority but, through the approval of Constitutions, certain rights were conferred.

While we insisted upon keeping our line on authority, the addition of “according to their respective roles as given in this Constitution and Statutes” ultimately satisfied the review committee and secured approval of our Constitution and Statutes.

Sister Nadine Foley, Prioress from 1986 to 1992, has served as the Congregation Historian for the past 18 years. She is the author of the second volume of Adrian Dominican history, Seeds Scattered and Grown.
In the 1980s, while working as a pastoral associate at a large parish in Southern California, I discovered the personal consequences that can result from doing what you think is moral and just.

One of the first parishioners I met with was Tom, 80, who had recently buried his wife. He had the reputation of being a saintly man who claimed to have visions of Mary and a gift of healing.

Because he attended daily Mass, Tom was given the key to open the church for morning Mass. Very early one morning, “Tom” (not his real name) noticed a woman dropping off her daughter for school. She asked him to watch her child in church until the parish school opened. Eventually, he did this every morning.

One day, the girl told the principal that Tom had asked her to do something in church that she did not want to do. The principal told one of the priests and the situation was frozen there: The principal was uncertain and fearful about what to do and the priest, who was Tom’s confessor, felt he could not act. That’s how I became involved. The pastor turned the matter over to me, asking me to investigate and respond.

I called the girl’s mother in for a consultation. She was in shock, and told me how kind Tom had been to her daughter, giving her various gifts. This was definitely a red flag! I had taken advantage of special workshops in pastoral counseling and was aware of the manipulation of sexual abuse situations with regard to children. I recognized the signs in this scenario. It all seemed to fit: the single mother, her need to get to work on time, and an older man who appeared very happy to spend time alone with her daughter. Together we contacted the authorities.

I continued my investigation with Tom’s extended family members and discovered a 20-something niece who admitted to being inappropriately touched by him on numerous occasions as a young child. I also had an experience of feeling uncomfortable during a visit to his home.

Ultimately, the story was reported in the newspapers and a family in San Diego—friends of Tom and his late wife—came forward. Shocked at what they read in the paper they had questioned their daughter and discovered that he had abused her.

I knew I had done the right thing: I had protected this child and other children from an abuser. Yet, my actions were perceived as uncaring by many.

A visiting bishop from Latin America had pressured me to stop the investigation of this “good and holy man.” I faced pressure from many parishioners, who saw me as a false accuser—at a time when accusations of sexual abuse were not acceptable. Among those parishioners, I lost my reputation as a good, caring person.

In time Tom pleaded “no contest,” and, because of his age, was sent to live in a retirement home for men and forbidden to drive or to have contact with children. As for me, the tension from this incident took its toll on my health, and I had to request a sabbatical.

“Claiming our moral authority” can lead us to the cross.
Congratulations and many blessings to the 2013 Double Diamond, Diamond, Golden, and Silver Jubilarians. Together they represent 3,270 years of dedicated service to the Adrian Dominican Mission. May these Sisters know the heartfelt gratitude of the Congregation and of all the people whose lives they have touched.
Standing up against oppression with the affected communities with whom one has chosen to share life and love is not a choice. It becomes an internal mandate from which, once recognized, there is no escape. I believe that everyone has an “aha” moment. Mine came one night in 1962 at an outdoor theatre in San Juan de la Maguana, Dominican Republic, when I was in my early 20s. The theatre consisted of benches in a lot and a hanging sheet. There was a cowboy movie playing and when the Indians had surrounded the cavalry and were killing off the soldiers, everyone in the lot cheered.

We see from where we stand. It was the beginning of questioning what I had always believed. With that questioning came realizations: that I lived a privileged life; that created in the image and likeness of God, I had moral authority; that I needed the humility and guts to step up to the plate.

In 1965, when the United States invaded the Dominican Republic, four of us were put on a Navy ship back to the States. I remember the U.S. sailors on board asking me, “What are these people like that we’re fighting?” They were about to go to war against the young men I had been teaching in high school every day. “They’re just like you!” The sailors didn’t know anything about U.S. policies of intervention in Latin America. They thought they were defending our country. So we talked about war and what people believe. It was a tragedy unfolding.

I soon returned to the Dominican Republic, then went to Guayama, Puerto Rico, for a few years, and back to the D.R. where I taught religion to fourth-year engineering students at the Catholic university in Santiago. At some point, the girls I was teaching asked me if I would chaperone a fast with them at a church in Santiago. They were protesting the arrest by the military of their fellow students on campus which the rector had allowed. I agreed. When I returned to my university office following the protest fast, all my things were in the hall. The rector, who is now a bishop, had fired me.

In 1976, I returned to the States where I taught at Aquinas High School on the Southside of Chicago. At the time, the student body was composed of all young black women. We were struggling to keep the school open and dealing with all the issues faced by our students. This was when, among other things, I started to look at women’s issues. Previously, I had erroneously thought the movement was about white women’s boredom. I began to see it as a universal justice issue, realizing that if the Catholic Church, which was so powerful around the world, treated women justly, it could make a significant difference. I was beginning to see all these issues, at home and abroad, as a whole cloth.
When we finally had to close Aquinas in 1983, I was sent to Nicaragua for three months, joining Sisters Andrea Balconis and Marie Michael, who were working with women at a sewing co-op in Acahualinca. My job was to teach the women how to do inventory. I loved it, though it was a heart-rending experience. Our country was supporting the contras in their efforts to overthrow the Sandinista government. In neighboring El Salvador, our government was backing the military dictatorship against a popular rebellion.

The sewing co-op was built right on top of the legal garbage dump. The women at the co-op who had invited us into their lives would tell us stories of preparing to dive into the ditches they made in the gaseous dump if enemy planes flew over. Those threatening planes and enemies were our government.

When I returned to Chicago I was fighting my own sense of impotency. Our government’s actions were made possible only because of my acquiescence, indifference, or denial. I felt I had to do something more than just write to my Congress people. The lived experience of Liberation Theology for 17 years with the people of Latin America and seven years with the girls on Chicago’s Southside were gifts I wasn’t supposed to waste. I needed to “up” my commitment to telling their stories in an effective way. At 8th Day Center I found the outlet I was seeking.

As a member of 8th Day Center, I joined the Pledge of Resistance, a group of men and women in their 30s and 40s seeking to end U.S. intervention in Latin America. Some were people of faith, others great humanitarians. It was a group I could resonate with on moral grounds, yet that would challenge me to move beyond my protected and predictable history. They spent a lot of time talking about getting the right message across to people who would see and/or be affected by our actions.

**Religious life hardly prepares one to choose civil disobedience.**

Religious life hardly prepares one to choose civil disobedience. As a religious I was acculturated to being nice, not confrontational, to everyone. If I chose public action, I had to learn to live with inconveniencing others and with being interpreted as naïve, irresponsible, or “jeopardizing the security of our older Sisters.”

For the next 12 years I participated in collective strategizing with this group of committed individuals whenever something came up that we thought was serious enough to warrant some kind of disruptive action to raise consciousness. It was all about educating the public.

A lot of people didn’t like it. Some would get really mad at those of us who were religious, saying, “Why aren’t you teaching at Catholic schools?” Over time, I think we made a difference in terms of how people saw notions of justice—and how they saw us as Catholic Sisters.

The first time I was arrested was for attempting to close down a federal building in Chicago to protest U.S. interventions in Central America. Our group took this action as a way to symbolize the idea that if the federal government couldn’t operate, then for at least that day we wouldn’t be invading another country or supporting dictators.

We were in front of a revolving door, blocking the entrance with linked arms. Two men who had done this before stood on either side of me. “We’ll take care of you,” they said. I was 35 years old and they figured I was Little Nell of Holy God. The police came along and told us we had to move. We stayed put. Then they pulled on us. I was ready to let go, but the two guys would not. We hung in there until we were thrown into a paddy wagon where we sat in the summer heat for three hours, melting away. Then we went to lock up.

First they fingerprint you, and then they put you in cells with one cot and one toilet out in the open for anyone walking by to see. Who of us nuns had ever gone to the bathroom in a cell with 10 other people? That was difficult. There was no such thing as sleeping because there was not enough room to spread out, and you would never lie on the floor because it was so filthy. Among those

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arrested was a group of musicians called Voices. Two of the Voices women had us singing all night.

Non-violent civil disobedience is one way, among many, to speak truth to power. My decision to exercise my moral authority in this way arose from private, prayerful reflection. I had to think it through, measuring the pros and cons. One thing that moved me was the sacrifice each of the members was willing to make in order to witness to their commitment to the global communities. Another was thinking about our founding mothers. Those who came before us wrapped themselves in newspapers and slept on porches in new schools. They made incredible sacrifices so we could move beyond ourselves to serve. We have to be very careful about invoking our older Sisters as a cause for not acting.

It is incumbent upon all of us to find our own ways and opportunities to claim and exercise our moral authority. Hierarchical structures are grounded in two principles that are either overtly or subliminally transmitted: (1) We must avoid doing the wrong thing because of how it will affect the whole, and (2) Since we need a higher authority to continually remind us of what we must do to live “correctly,” we are probably not equipped to make good decisions outside of the structure.

But then, if not us, who? As we are drawn into an inescapable sense of responsiveness and responsibility, new insights hover around the periphery of our consciousness and there is a demand for creativity. This is not my story. It is a tiny, tiny piece of the universe story. It is one short, squat kid being drawn into not just a particular religious community, or a broader community of believers, but rather into a growing, groaning consciousness of oneness with the evolving Divinity.

Sister Jean Hughes serves at St. Leonard Ministries, Chicago, a non-profit agency that helps prepare men and women who have been in prison to lead successful lives in their communities.

Having a “Social Conscience”

Joyce Caulfield, OP

Early on, during my 37 years in correctional prison facilities in Puerto Rico, I learned that I needed credibility to address identified areas of concern. Developing and maintaining credibility with both the staff and residents was sometimes challenging, however. This was especially true with some who believed that I was out of place addressing areas not specifically related to the academic courses I was teaching or to the defined chaplaincy responsibilities.

As I entered the prison daily, one of the Scripture passages I frequently used for guidance was Micah 6:8: “…This is what God asks of you...to act justly, love tenderly and to walk humbly with your God.” In my efforts to act justly, I have at times taken a stand in issues of justice, both in the correctional facilities and out.

One incident, inside prison, took place at the correctional institution for young men between the ages of 17 and 21, when the residents decided to make public their protest regarding the physical violence/punishment allegedly used toward them by some staff. They wrote their concerns on a bed sheet draped from a cell window. I agreed with their denunciation of physical abuse but spoke with them about my own desire to hang a sheet from an adjacent window, denouncing the residents’ use of physical punishment against other residents who violated their own “approved” internal norms. The resident leaders agreed to discuss their inconsistency in denouncing staff discipline procedures which they, in turn, incorporated against other residents.

Another incident, outside the prison, involved my taking action to protest the U.S. bombing of Vieques, a small, populated island...
off the coast of Puerto Rico. For more than 40 years, the U.S. Navy coordinated periodic live-fire training maneuvers on this island. During one of the Navy’s maneuvers, a civilian guard was accidentally killed, triggering a long-term protest to end the bombing exercises on Vieques.

As time went on, it was important for me to better understand the reality that the people of Vieques were living. I sometimes spent my two regular days off on the island. I would take the ferry over to Vieques on Friday morning, observe the bombing exercises that afternoon, and assist with the preparation of an evening meal for those who were preparing to take part in civil disobedience, and their supporters. I would spend all of Friday night in prayer. I also took part in peaceful, non-violent actions organized for observers on Vieques.

Of the estimated 1,000 individuals who took part in civil disobedience to protest the bombings, those who were arrested were ordinarily placed for one to six months in the detention center where I ministered. I considered civil disobedience; however, discernment led me to the self-understanding that I was in ministry at that particular prison at that given time in order to have free movement within the institution and to be available to accompany others on their spiritual journey while incarcerated. My arrest or detention for civil disobedience would have compromised, if not ended, that access.

On one holiday, a protest was held directly across the street from the prison. I had been advised by some not to take part in that particular demonstration. However, to the consternation of advisors, my conscience overrode the well-intentioned advice I had received.

Word of my involvement in these protests reached the local community. Little by little, people on Vieques learned that I was the chaplain from the prison. Many seemed surprised that the chaplain had, what they called, a “social conscience.” Through TV news coverage, co-workers from the prison saw me participating in these demonstrations. Some were in the military and interpreted my participation in the protests as anti-government or anti-U.S. Although some might have identified with the adage, “my country, right or wrong,” my belief was that “since it is my country, let us/U.S. do it right.”

Like so many of us, I continue to be challenged by past experiences and events—challenged to reflect upon what changes I want to see, what sacrifices I am willing to make, what risks I am willing to take—in order to bring about such changes.

Sister Joyce Caulfield has ministered in Puerto Rico for 17 years as an educator in a facility for young men and for 20 years as a chaplain at a detention center for adult women and men.
Speaking truth in the area of human sexuality in the Church has been like riding a wild bronco. By "Church" I mean hundreds of lay persons, consecrated women religious, priests, and—yes—an archbishop, all with differing opinions.

After teaching natural family planning to 2,500 couples, I was well aware of the ill effects of contraceptives—heart conditions, kidney tumors, cancer in the upper uterus, escaped and floating IUDs, headaches, and so on. Despite all this, ridicule in high and low places was rampant. When contraceptives failed then there was and is recourse to the final one, abortion.

In one year, 20 young women came to me facing the choice of whether or not to have an abortion. Only one decided to have the abortion. She later said, "You were right about the consequences." Nightmares. Regrets. Suicidal tendencies. I am not speaking here of medical procedures meant to save life, but of the deliberate killing of a viable, healthy fetus.

One incident involving this issue changed the direction of my life. In 1972, as head of the Social Studies Department at the Catholic high school in which I taught, students were telling me that abortion was acceptable, according to their Social Studies professor. After speaking with the teacher to no avail, I had a conference with the principal. His reply was: "There is room for all kinds of teaching." I very quickly left that school.

After a few weeks of wondering what I would do next, I received a call from a friend asking me to take on a position for combatting drugs and alcohol in a small town. Not being acquainted with addiction, I declined, but was assured that all that was needed was to love the persons suffering. The town was near a reservation and every weekend found intoxicated women lying on the ground. A woman was needed to work with those women.

What followed quickly was an offer of two grants—one to the University of St. Louis, Missouri, and the other at the University of Arizona in Tucson, Arizona—both offering crash courses on the subject. I attended both.

The next five years were an adventure and, for me, a joy. My work included women from all levels of society, especially from the reservation. Armenia (not her real name), for example, was addicted to heroin and had climbed on top of her roof. The fire department and police force were cajoling her to come down and she refused. She mentioned my name and I soon found myself on top of a ladder helping her down. As we walked to the house I asked her how she had climbed up. She smiled sweetly and said, "Do you want me to show you?"

All this was a far cry from being a teacher in a high school. My new career, which lasted for five years, reaffirmed for me that when God comes first in others and in me all works out well. To this day I realize that there is a golden thread orchestrated by God who is Life that runs through my life. Would I do it again? Yes.

Sister Margaret Karam ministers with consecrated women in the Focolare movement at its U.S. headquarters in Hyde Park, New York.
I shall call “Mary” came to see me. Mary was in her 50s; she and her husband had three children in college and her husband was close to retirement. Mary suffered from severe asthma and had been on heavy medications, including steroids, for several years.

Mary’s doctor determined that she was pregnant and, knowing her medical history, was concerned that she could never survive a pregnancy. He recommended an abortion. Her husband was terrified for his wife. In a state of trauma, she was hurried to a clinic to terminate this pregnancy. Immediately thereafter, she and her husband went to confession, each feeling the gravity of their action. Mary needed pastoral counseling and spiritual direction, absolution notwithstanding.

I couldn’t help but contrast these two cases. One appeared to be a girl’s disposal of an inconvenience, the other a matter of survival.

I was in no position to second-guess the couple. My role was to listen with an open heart to Mary’s story, to empathize with her crisis, encourage her inner healing, and pray with her for forgiveness of herself.

In my accompaniment with Mary, I became saddened by heartless, militant, anti-abortion demonstrations, and the public outcry against women. I knew in every fiber of my being that I could never again return to that “certainty” or my condemnation of others in similar situations. I am sure of this: the issue is far more complicated than observers can ever know.

I don’t know why a woman might seek to end a pregnancy. My presumption is that some may be like the first case; others may be made by those who are desperate. My hope is that the decision is treated with seriousness by both the women and the men who impregnated them and that I would be non-judgmental and compassionate, no matter what. My deepest hope is that we can address the circumstances which make a woman feel so desperate that abortion appears to be her only option.

I have retreated from the absolute moral stand I would have taken before my experience with Mary. Am I pro-abortion? Absolutely not! Do I reverence life? Yes! In this case, I’m happy that Mary had a choice.

Sister Mary Ann Dixon, having worked in parishes for 50 years, is “humbled by the lives, struggles, spirituality, and ‘living theology’” of those with whom she served.
In the Spirit of Catherine of Siena

An interview with Mary Catherine Hilkert, OP

What do you see as some of the key differences and similarities between the Church and world of Catherine’s time and our time?

Historian Barbara Tuchman talked about the 14th century—Catherine’s century—as the “distant mirror” of our own. I too see similarities such as the world of war and violence; the Bubonic Plague, which devastated whole countries as the AIDS pandemic does today; famine; poverty; and their own form of political gridlock, with the wars among the Italian city-states and with Rome, the papal states.

There are also similarities with the ecclesial scandals of our own day: sexual abuse, economic scandals, and cover-ups. Catherine was aware of poor leadership and the need to speak out about what’s wrong and to reform the Church of her day. She called on the baptized to take their place within the Church and to be the disciples that they were called to be.

At the same time, we need to realize how different the 14th century was and claim our own responsibility to discern about our times. Catherine was a laywoman.

Our structures and community support are different from her resources. She addressed issues in a more personal and direct way, by, for example, caring for the plague victims. We sponsor health care systems, serve as members of boards, and take stands on health care reform. Catherine had a different and more limited worldview in areas such as inter-religious dialogue. She had a very Christo-centric and ecclesial-centric vision and even advocated for a crusade. But we are called to remain rooted in Christ and to be ecclesial women in the context of dialogue with other world religions and other cultures.

Catherine saw her asceticism as an aspect of self-knowledge and holiness. She knew that her eating practices were extreme and didn’t advocate that her followers adopt them. We can be inspired by her, but find our own call to follow Christ rather than to directly pattern ourselves on her. Because so many young women have eating disorders, some of Catherine’s ascetical practices would be dangerous to embrace in our day.
What do you think Catherine would feel compelled to address in Church and society today, if she were living right now?

The first thing she might say is that we need to discern that ourselves. She, the 14th-century woman, can’t tell us directly, but the first issue that came to my mind was human trafficking—the profound violation of human dignity and well-being, especially of women and children. I also think of global poverty and starvation, lack of resources for education, economic disparity and misuse of economic power, political gridlock, war, the use of drones, and our culture of violence. The emphasis which you as Adrian Dominicans have put on addressing racism as another systemic form of violence and lack of respect for the dignity of all persons is certainly something Catherine would support. She also had a deep love of creation, which can help to inspire our ecological concern and our own love of the Earth and all of its creatures.

I think she would encourage us to speak out against the Church’s sexual abuse crisis and cover-up and encourage us to be advocates for unity in the Church, which can be very painful. Catherine received some pretty significant ecclesiastical support. We don’t have that support by virtue of office and rarely hold it in any kind of public way. Nevertheless, I think Catherine would say that that doesn’t let us off the hook. Our vocation is from God and it’s our responsibility to discern the needs and how to meet them, not to wait for an official appointment or for someone else to recognize us.

In the introduction to your book, you noted that St. Catherine of Siena poses challenges to women of our day as we strive to “speak with the authority of the Spirit.” What are some of those challenges?

Probably the most fundamental challenge is to be rooted in the Spirit, in our own prayer and contemplative lives, and to “dwell in the cell of self-knowledge,” as she says in her Dialogue. We need to be deeply grounded in God if we’re going to speak with the authority of the Spirit.

Catherine challenges us to speak out even when we feel inadequate. Many of us, I think, have grown weary and want to drop out of ecclesial and political disputes. Catherine nudges us to stay engaged in difficult conversations, or to initiate conversations that make a difference for the common good and for the mission of the Church. She herself had wanted to lead a more peaceful, contemplative life, and then heard God telling her, “On two feet you have to walk and on two wings you

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have to fly”—love of God and love of neighbor. In our case, I think that means being engaged in the Church, in the difficult places, at the margins, on the issues of our day.

I think also of the challenge of itinerancy. There’s a real asceticism connected with that. Catherine went out on a preaching mission in the countryside because so many people hadn’t heard the word of God. Often we associate preaching with the pulpit. We still need to raise that issue, but preaching is much broader than that, and going through the countryside has its parallel in our day. What are we called to? It could be writing a blog when that’s not the mode of communication that we’re most comfortable with, realizing that it engages the younger generation. It could mean leaving our name in nomination, accepting the responsibility of leadership at all levels.

In our 2010 General Chapter, we committed ourselves to “claim our moral authority to speak truth in Church and society in the spirit of Catherine of Siena.” From your understanding of Catherine, what are the implications of striving to live out this commitment in her spirit?

The first thing I’d say in the spirit of St. Catherine of Siena is that we’ve got to be faithful to our contemplative lives and our contemplative vocation. That includes study, prayer, and honest attempts at self-knowledge. We also have a different communal context than Catherine’s, so that means discerning as a Congregation—or, more broadly, as an Order or a community—what we’re called to; committing ourselves to dialogue wherever we find ourselves; and listening carefully for the truth in the position of the other.

Mary O’Driscoll, OP, spoke of Catherine as an “Emissary of Peace,” open to both sides as a bridge-builder, and speaking the truth in love, whatever the cost. Catherine was a woman of courage, which Ernest Hemingway defined as “grace under pressure.” She certainly exhibited that.

Along with courage, discernment, and contemplation, we’re called to action, to follow-through. We’re committing ourselves to being dismissed perhaps, for some of our views, or for being naïve, and to a form of interdependence. No group stands on its own and has all the insights. Certainly, no individual does. To be willing to put our gifts at the service of Church or the common good is part of what we’re committing ourselves to.

I think we’re committing ourselves to a more global attention to the suffering of the world, where we’re called to be in solidarity. We’re committing ourselves to a simpler lifestyle. Catherine critiqued the clergy and the religious of her day for living extravagantly and lacking concern for the poor. Her witness was authentic: The way that she lived also spoke, which was one reason people turned to her. In that sense we’re calling ourselves to an ongoing conversion.

What will we most regret that we did not speak out on or where we did not stand in solidarity?
What can we learn from Catherine about how to respond to the Vatican investigations of women religious?

The LCWR response to the investigation is a great model. It was a choice not to simply withdraw, saying, “We’ve been unfairly accused. We have been dismissed. We’ve been misrepresented.” It showed genuine concern for the unity of the Church and for the good of the Church that we wanted to stay in conversation and to do that prayerfully, not at the cost of compromise of our own integrity or values. Catherine speaks of “winning enemies with the hook of love” or “snatching the rose from the thorn.” It’s important to build allies, not to make people enemies in advance but to try to build genuine relationships. It was good to say, “We’re going to keep confidence here and we’re going to operate in trust and direct communication. We trust that you will do the same.”

There’s a line in the third part of my book that isn’t a quote from Catherine, but it really resonates with her quote about speaking out with one hundred thousand voices. Audre Lorde, a black lesbian poet, was facing cancer and knew that she was probably dying. In a speech, she said, “You know, at the end of my life, or what might be the end of my life, what I most regretted were my silences. What did I ever fear so much?” I think that’s something to reflect on as we face our own limitations. It’s another way of discerning: What will we most regret that we did not speak out on or where we did not stand in solidarity?
Reflection Questions

Can you recall a time when you withheld from speaking truth?
What held you back?

How would you describe the growth and evolution of your sense of moral agency?
Where do you feel grounded and true?

Can you think of any examples in your life when hearing the voices of others changed your sense of truth?

What are the ways in which we, individually and communally, are being called to exercise our moral authority today in Church and society?

Are there silences we are keeping today that we would regret 50 or 100 years from now if we were able to project ourselves into that future and look back?
Impelled by the Gospel
And outraged by the injustices
of our day
seek truth,
make peace,
reverence life.

Stirred by the Wisdom of God and rooted
in our contemplative prayer, communal
study and life in community, we challenge
heresies of local and global domination,
exploitation, and greed that privilege some,
dehumanize others, and ravage Earth.

We confront our racist attitudes and root
out racist practices in our lives and
systems.

We confront systems where women
are denied freedom, equality, and full
personhood.

We walk in solidarity with people
who are poor and challenge
structures that impoverish them.

We practice non-violent
peacemaking.

We promote lay leadership and
shared decision-making for a
renewed Church.

We live right relationships with Earth community.
We claim the communal authority and responsibility of our
Dominican heritage.
We commit ourselves to live this vision.

General Chapter 2004

Our Vision continues
to impel us . . .

As contemplative ecclesial women,
global citizens, and humans in
God’s unfolding universe:

We commit to live simply and
sustainably for the sake of the whole
Earth community.

We commit to study worldviews and
emerging theologies informed by science and
our suffering world.

We commit to open our hearts
to the other and deepen
our understanding of diverse
cultures and beliefs.

We commit to claim our moral
authority to speak truth in
Church and society in the
spirit of Catherine
of Siena.

We call one another to
mutual accountability and
transformation.

General Chapter 2010
It all began a long time ago. Wanting to be only in God.

Such gift. Ocean of Being, Light beyond light, unruptured Love Within savagery of the cross.

But who can know the ecstasy of that singular moment when, seized by the unutterable Spirit, aflame with God-fire, sheathed in light, rough-shod I walked roads unknown, skies widened beyond Siena?

In me, the broken cross, In me, the ravaged poor, In me, the impassioned God becoming Word for the Beloved – the torn and hurting world.

Catherine, Catherine, Wild-winged cry of the One Who loves, be in our road, our skies, our passage Home.

We glimpse rivers, terrain beneath her, see fragments of her white habit flying, and with her the ragged vestiges of the poor she so loves and serves. Her cloak streams behind her, bearing to us – fire and Word.

**The Tapestry**

A fabric-appliqued tapestry that brings the presence of St. Catherine of Siena to her patronal space. Barbara Chenicek, OP, originated the concept, developing it with Rita Schiltz, OP, who brought the tapestry into being. Created over 40 months, the 6’ 7” x 16’ 8” tapestry is comprised of more than 4,500 pieces.

This tapestry is not about a tapestry. It is a summoning of Catherine, a call to her, that she might call us out from what we are to what, in the Spirit, we are called to be.

Text drawn from the Catherine Tapestry brochure created by INAI Studio. © 2009 Adrian Dominican Sisters