800 Years Young: Celebrating the Dominicans

WRITTEN BY MARJORIE CAMPBELL

On Oct. 31, 2015, the head of the global Dominican Order, or “master of the order,” will celebrate Mass at St. Dominic’s Church to open the order’s 800th anniversary — a Jubilee year — for the entire Dominican community of friars, nuns, lay members and, of course, parishioners.

St. Dominic’s Parochial Vicar, the Rev. Isaiah Molano, O.P., says the Rev. Dr., Master of the Order, Bruno Cadorè could have chosen for this momentous occasion “Rome, Paris, London or Bologna, Italy. Yet, he has chosen to come to San Francisco to usher in the 800th anniversary.” Dominicans from around the world will converge on our parish for this celebration to open a year of renewal as “doers of the word,” says Fr. Molano.

Fr. Molano is particularly excited by the Dominicans’ staying power and ability to attract the next generation of Dominican friars. “The mission of the order is as relevant today as it was 800 years ago. The Jubilee’s class of entering friars is all under 30 years old. I was only 22 when I entered.” But the young still seek to do what St. Dominic did 800 years ago, Fr. Molano says. “The mission has not changed for eight centuries. We communicate God’s love, radiating joy. Our modes of communication have changed but the mission is the same.”

That mission began canonically on Dec. 22, 1216, when Pope Honorius III issued the church’s formal recognition of an order started years earlier by Father Dominic de Guzman, whose father was a Castilian nobleman and whose mother was known for her piety. Dominic’s intelligence and charity emerged early in his youth. By age 25, Dominic was an ordained priest. He found success preaching against damaging heresies of the times, living a life of poverty and virtue, and attracting others to his informal order of preachers. The formal direction for Dominic’s new order came to him as he prayed at Rome in the church of St. Peter for the increasing of his order, and he saw in a vision the glorious princes of the Apostles Peter and Paul coming toward him. Peter handed him a staff and Paul a book, who together said, ‘Go and preach, for you have been chosen by God for this ministry.’

At that moment, Dominic foresaw his order dispersed throughout the whole world, preaching the word of God to the nations. Likely Dominic saw his order dispersed over time as well. Today, his order of preachers includes not only Fr. Molano in San Francisco, but over 6,000 Dominican friars bringing the message of God’s love throughout the world, just as they have done for 800 years.

Today’s friars pursue the Dominican mission in good company — the or-
The Dominicans (CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1)
der’s many women religious. Sister Anne Bertain, O.P. of the Dominican Sisters of San Rafael points out, “The first religious order established by St. Dominic was actually a women’s order. Many people don’t realize this.”

In fact, throughout the Dominican history, women have been called to the Dominican charism, with St. Catherine of Siena perhaps being the most notable. According to Sr. Bertain, Dominican women religious formed the backbone of the San Francisco Archdiocese, established on July 29, 1853, from the wild diversity of Irish, French, German, Italian, Chinese and Spanish immigrants, as well as Native Americans who settled in the growing region. As Sr. Bertain says, “The Dominican sisters arrived here with Bishop Alemany. We settled first in Benicia, Calif., and then in San Rafael, Calif.” These Dominican sisters were the first religious women in California.

Sr. Bertain’s order became known as the Dominican Sisters of San Rafael and in 1915 opened the Dominican College (now Dominican University) in San Rafael — the first college in California to grant bachelor’s degrees to women. They also ran a number of schools, including the schools formerly located at St. Dominin’s Church and the Sacred Heart Parish at Fillmore and Fell streets. The Dominican Sisters of San Rafael continue to serve in a variety of ways, including running St. Dominic’s Lima Center day shelter for homeless, along with providing religious instruction and liturgy preparation at Mission Dolores Academy in San Francisco.

Another congregation of Dominican Sisters, the Dominican Sisters of Mission San Jose, first arrived in San Francisco in 1876 and continues to serve in the Bay Area, and throughout California, even as far south as Mexico. In San Francisco, the congregation focuses on helping underprivileged youth at the Immaculate Conception Academy, St. James School, St. Anthony-Immaculate Conception Schools, all located in the Mission District.

Dominican longevity impresses even in the Bay Area. Here, Bishop Alemany — himself a Dominican — facilitated the official establishment of the Order of Preachers in 1850 upon arriving in the area with fellow Dominicans. Originally situated in Monterey, Calif., then Benicia, Calif., the Dominicans received control of St. Brigid’s Parish at Broadway and Van Ness streets and St. Francis of Assisi Parish in North Beach in the early 1860s. The preachers moved into the Western Addition in 1873 where their priory and primary parish remain to this day.

Still pursuing the original mission of St. Dominic, modern Dominicans live and operate upon both the physical and spiritual foundation of the centuries, “reenvisioning and reimagining the good news of salvation for our place and time,” as Rev. Michael Hurley, O.P., describes the enduring charism. The age of the order, with its depth of history and tradition, remains an attractive attribute. “I looked at lots of different orders,” Fr. Hurley says, “but without a doubt the age of the Dominicans offered a sense of truth that would not go away tomorrow, that lasted through centuries.”

Fr. Hurley, like so many of the Dominicans readying for the 800th Jubilee celebration, considers the Dominican traditions an integral part of its treasure. He looks forward to the entire Dominican family “in its many parts and branches, with its many skills and gifts” coming together with Master Bruno to launch the Jubilee year of renewal, “connected as the family we are.”

MORE ABOUT THE JUBILEE ON PAGE 8!

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Joseph Sadoc Alemany (Wikimedia Commons)
Honorius III Approving the Rule of St. Dominic in 1216, by Leandro Bassano (Wikimedia Commons)
Profile: The Rev. Felix Cassidy, O.P.
WRITTEN BY DOMINIQUE KIM

You needn't spend much time with the Rev. Felix Cassidy, O.P. to know that he lives up to his name, which is Latin for “happy” or “joyful.” But those who have been blessed to know him over many years paint a striking picture of how he has touched countless lives as classmate, Merchant Marine, missionary, priest, friend to children and the poor, and cherished friend.

“If there was anyone you’d call the patron friar of St. Dominic’s Parish, it’s Fr. Felix Cassidy,” says St. Dominic’s Prior and Parochial Vicar, the Rev. Steve Maekawa, O.P. “He is among the last of the old guard of St. Jude’s Shrine, the one friar most associated with St. Dominic’s parish because of his longevity, his personality, and his dedication to the church. He loves the faithful,” says Fr. Maekawa.

And apparently the faithful love him, dearly.

A native of San Francisco, Cassidy grew up just over the hill from St. Dominic’s Church on Vallejo Street between Pierce and Scott streets. He attended both St. Vincent de Paul’s Parish and St. Dominic’s Church as a boy with his parents and three sisters.

“Everyone loved ‘little Frankie’ because of his delightful personality and goodness,” recalled Fr. de Porres Walsh.

As a teenager, Cassidy was a great athlete as a swimmer at St. Ignatius High School and was a lifeguard at the Bohemian Grove — the famous vacation place of the Bohemian Club, an exclusive men’s social club then attended by every American president.

Graduating high school in 1945, Cassidy joined the Merchant Marines as an apprentice helmsman during the demobilization of armed forces after the end of World War II, steering servicemen home from the Pacific War to the West Coast.

He then sailed the world for a year, returning when he was 19 years old to enroll at the University of San Francisco. Soon after, Cassidy entered the Dominican novitiate at St. Ignatius Church, made his solemn profession at St. Albert’s Priory in Berkeley, Calif., in 1952, and was ordained priesthood in 1954.

The Rev. Thomas Hayes, O.P., met Cassidy at St. Albert’s Priory while Cassidy was making his solemn profession and reminisced about their days as fellow students, saying, “Fr. Felix would mow the lawn and help upkeep the grounds. Once he put up a sign on the garden shed saying, ‘Please keep the tools in order, and the Order will keep you.’ He’s just a lot of fun to be around. He’s a joyful person.”

After his ordination as a Dominican, one of Cassidy’s first assignments was...
Brother Andrew-Marie McCullough    |    Age: 24
Grew up: Puget Sound and Seattle, Washington
College and Major: University of Washington; Bachelor of Arts in mechanical engineering
Before the Novitiate: Being decisively prepared for the novitiate, and being set for a response to God’s call to a religious vocation
Attracted by: The whole of the Dominican way signified by, “contemplare et contemplata aliis tradere,” which translated to English means, “to contemplate and to share with others the fruits of this contemplation”
Food: All good food, but especially food without gobs of butter or other savory ingredients
Hobbies/interests: Exercise, hiking, camping, light yardwork, board games, exploring, being on the water, inventing games and fixing things
Favorite saint: Juan de la Cruz, or John of the Cross — because he was one of the first saints whose life enkindled a deep aspiration for saintly sanctity
Interesting facts: I enjoy using game theory to analyze games, and once had nearly twenty pages of scribbly notes by the time I was done.

Brother Joseph Marie Dinh    |    Age: 26
Grew up: Saigon, Viet Nam, and Houston, Texas
College and Major: University of Houston; Bachelor of Arts in marketing
Before the Novitiate: Student
Attracted by: The spirituality of the Dominicans; the community, the friars in our Vietnamese Vicariate; the contemplative life, preaching and the habit
Food: Many cuisines but, being Vietnamese, especially pho and bo hue
Hobbies/interests: Reading theological books, recording, mixing and listening to music
Favorite saint: Joseph Marie is my religious name because Joseph is my baptismal patron saint, and I am very devoted to Our Lady.
Interesting facts: I’m an unusual introvert, differentiating between “crowded places” and “meeting friends.” I’m a monastic-type-of person.

Brother Columban Mary Hall    |    Age: 29
Grew up: South Bend, Indiana, and Houston, Texas.
College and Major: University of St. Thomas; and University of San Francisco; Bachelor of Arts in English literature
Before the Novitiate: Teaching third-grade language arts, Latin, literature and math at a small liberal-arts school for boys
Attracted by: The powerful intellectual tradition, the communal life and private prayer and study; witnessing the lives of the friars here at St. Dominic’s (my parish when I was at USF); and the holy life of St. Dominic himself, particularly his charity
Food: Probably whatever food is in front of me, but I’m partial to Asian food such as sushi, ramen, pho and sukiyaki
Hobbies/interests: Reading and writing, but simply talking with friends over good food and drink is one of the most enjoyable things on earth
Favorite saint: The Blessed Virgin because in her is every virtue, every grace and every patronage
Interesting facts: I have audio-visual synesthesia, which means I mentally perceive sound as color.
What is the Novitiate?

The novitiate is the beginning period of formation for those entering the Dominican order. It is a year-long period dedicated to introducing men to the Dominican life, and letting them live it. It also helps the novices discern whether or not this is their true calling (and to discern if the Dominican community is a good fit for them). The brothers study, pray, preach, minister and, especially, learn what it means to be part of the 800-year tradition of St. Dominic’s order.

Brother Damien Dominic Nguyen  |  Age: 24
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Grew up: Saigon, Vietnam, and Campbell, California
College and Major: University of California, Berkeley; Bachelor of Science in electrical engineering and computer science
Before the Novitiate: Student
Attracted by: The habit, the Order’s history throughout 800 years; the life of St. Dominic, whose name is my baptismal name; and the works of St. Thomas Aquinas
Food: Pho, and hu tieu (kuy teav)
Hobbies/interests: Playing the piano and video games, hiking, and listening to music.
Favorite saint: St. Damien of Molokai is my hero, my religious name and my patron saint; thinking of him quickly brings me the peace of a great, humble and gentle servant
Interesting facts: I represented my high school in a piano competition at the Campbell, California, Community Center Heritage Theater, and won third place.

Brother Scott Norgaard  |  Age: 24
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Grew up: Phoenix, Arizona.
College and Major: Rice University; Bachelor of Arts in mathematical economic analysis
Before the Novitiate: Worked at a management consulting company in Houston, Texas
Attracted by: The habit, the Dominican’s long history and solid tradition; the charism of preaching; the blend of active and contemplative life; and the Dominican saints’ contribution to the church
Food: Cheesecake
Hobbies/interests: Running, hiking, visiting national parks (especially the Grand Canyon), playing the piano, and good conversation
Favorite saint: St. Paul because of his boldness in proclaiming the faith, and St. Padre Pio, who had many spiritual gifts, and was an amazing witness in our modern times
Interesting facts: I hiked about 120 miles with my dad on the Camino — a popular pilgrimage route to Santiago de Compostela, a city in Spain where the remains of St. James are kept.

Brother Patrick Rooney  |  Age: 23
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Grew up: Ojai, California, and Oakhurst, California (just south of Yosemite)
College and Major: Thomas Aquinas College; Bachelor of Arts in liberal arts.
Before the Novitiate: Student
Attracted by: The order’s beautiful liturgy and strong theology; the Dominican charisms of prayer, study, preaching and common life; and the excitement of preaching the Gospels
Food: Rice-crispy cookies
Hobbies/interests: Reading, writing and thinking about philosophical issues; singing songs, and talking with friends
Favorite saint: Pope St. John Paul II, a beacon of hope in a world full of fear
Interesting facts: Both of my parents come from families of 14 kids. I was homeschooled. I can ride a unicycle (but probably not with the habit).
Rev. Felix Cassidy
(CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3)

at St. Vincent Ferrer Parish in Vallejo, Calif. Fr. de Porres Walsh says, “He was loved by the kids and when I was a lay teacher in the school, the graduating class of 1963 dedicated their year book to him.” Martin continues, “At one point he had converted to the Catholic faith the family of singer Johnny Mathis and brought Mathis’ brother, also a well-known singer, to perform at one of the youth dances at St. Vincent. The kids went wild with enthusiasm!”

Fr. Cassidy’s globe-trekking adventures were by no means limited to the Merchant Marines. In the 1970s, he volunteered to help out at a Dominican missionary outpost in Chiapas, Southern Mexico, not knowing a word of Spanish or the native language of Tzeltal. He would stay there for nearly six years.

St. Dominic’s current pastor, the Rev. Michael Hurley, O.P., recalls his amazement when — on a visit years ago to the Dominican mission in Chiapas, Mexico — he opened an old photo album dominated by pictures of none other than Fr. Cassidy! “By far the most common Western Dominican in the photos was Fr. Felix,” says Hurley. “In every one of these photos he had the widest grin, the natives are just embracing him and around him. When I talked to the friars who live there, they remembered him quite vividly. There is a lived history of Fr. Felix down there in the jungle!” Hurley continues saying, “What they’d remember is he’d pick up a tambourine or some kind of musical instrument and always had some kind of beverage in his hand — he was like a one-man party. And he wasn’t fluent by any means.

When the Indians discovered that he was being transferred, there was weeping and begging him to stay.”

Over the years, Fr. Cassidy has served in a variety of capacities along the West Coast, including pastor and superior in many places including Antioch, Calif., San Francisco, Reno, Nev., and Portland, Ore., before settling in at St. Dominic’s Church for nearly 30 years.

The many who love and speak dearly of Fr. Felix view him as an ever-present blessing. Sister Ann Providence is currently the Director of Religious Education at Mission Dolores Academy in San Francisco, and taught at St. Dominic’s School in the 1960s and has known Fr. Felix for almost 50 years. She says, “He’s always been a blessing ever since I first met him in 1967. I was just beginning teaching the seventh grade at St. Dominic’s School. To this day, whenever I meet Fr. Felix, he always gives me a blessing. And because I’ve been in education all these years, he always says, ‘And may God bless your children, too.’ He never fails to remember the children.”

Brother Gregory Lira, O.P., is a longtime friend of Fr. Cassidy since their days at the Reno, Nev., cathedral in the early 1980s. “He enjoys any place where he was,” says Lira. And that includes where the music is. Whether listening to Nancy Wilson in Emeryville, Calif., Dionne Warwick at the Concord Pa-
vilion, or Lawrence Welk on TV in the community room, Lira claims Fr. Felix knew every single lyric— and wasn’t shy to sing along.

Parish staff and parishioners also speak fondly of the impact Fr. Cassidy makes in their daily lives. “I work part time at St. Dominic’s. [Father Felix] always brings me over magazines to read when the phones are not ringing too much,” says Veronica Sanchez-Tovar. “He always asks me how my day is going so far, has a smile and candid gesture to bless me. He lifts my spirit! He is so generous and caring,” says Sanchez-Tovar.

Parishioner Alyson Voltmer adds to this sentiment saying, “Fr. Felix is our living saint at St. Dominic’s! He is always joyful and greets you with, ‘It’s so good to see you,’ and makes you feel like you’re the only person in the room. He will stop wherever he is going to bless anyone that walks by him.”

Despite intermittent health issues, Fr. Cassidy has always been quick to get back to the long lines of people awaiting him (and specifically him) for confession at the Sunday 9 p.m. Mass or for blessings following the daily 5:30 p.m. St. Jude’s Mass.

“Fr. Felix is a priest’s priest,” says Fr. Hurley, “As long as he’s living on earth, he’s going to be a priest. He’s not taking any time off. The idea of him resting up doesn’t translate.” Hurley adds, “That sense of who he is — it’s identified with what he does in bringing Christ to life. You talk about a priest — theologically speaking — being in ‘persona Christi,’ that person of Christ. His life is a sacrament. He is that person of Christ.”

Fr. Cassidy’s impact on the faithful has spanned decades, generations, and continents. He is a helmsman in every sense, staying the course unwaveringly, guiding the faithful and lifting their spirits. He bears a soft touch and a light heart. He is indeed, in the words of Fr. Hurley, “always welcoming, always there.”

**Dominican Fun Facts:**

- The “O.P.” suffix Dominicans add after their name stands for Ordo Praedicatorum (“Order of Preachers” in English)
- The origin of popes wearing a white habit can be traced to Pope Innocent V, a Dominican elected to the papacy in 1276. Innocent continued to wear his Dominican habit as pope and was so respected that subsequent popes adopted the white habit
- St. Catherine of Sienna, one of only three Dominicans and four women among the 36 Doctors of the Church, was a lay Dominican
- While studying to become a Dominican, St. Thomas Aquinas, another Doctor of the Church and one of the greatest theologians of all time, was referred to by his classmates as “the dumb ox.”
Preparing for the Dominican Jubilee

BY MARJORIE CAMPBELL

The 800th anniversary of the Dominican community launches Oct. 31, 2015, at St. Dominic’s Church in San Francisco. The Rev. Dr. Bruno Cadorè, the master of the Dominican Order, will preside. Master Bruno, like many Dominicans from around the world, will travel to San Francisco from Rome. A French physician and moral theologian, Master Bruno was elected 87th Master of the Order of Preachers on Sept. 5, 2010.

Attending Mass with Master Bruno and the diverse Dominican community offers a unique, exhilarating start to the Jubilee year ahead. As Fr. Molano sums up the occasion, “It blows my mind that I am right here, the only spot in the world, where the heir to St. Dominic will launch the Jubilee!”

For Fr. Hurely, the Jubilee offers a period of renewal and opportunity to reflect on the charism of the Dominicans. “Charism means ‘gift’ in Greek,” he explains. “Charisms remain present throughout the process of creating the world. We are not a sum of parts, but gathered, beneficiaries of God’s gifts.” Throughout the 800th Jubilee, Fr. Hurley looks forward to reflecting and manifesting the unique charism of the Dominicans. “I intend to contemplate scripture, join communal reflection and share and communicate our Dominican charism, to preach for the salvation of souls.” This, Fr. Hurley says, “is and has been the heartbeat of the Dominicans since we were founded in 1216.”

The Jubilee is also a good opportunity to read about the Dominicans, according to Sr. Bertain. Recently retired and excited for this remarkable anniversary, she plans “to go back and review history about St. Dominic. I want to catch up on so much reading material about the Dominicans over the centuries.”

For people interested in following Sr. Bertain’s example, Fr. Molano recommends “The New Wine of Dominican Spirituality: A Drink Called Happiness” by Paul Murray, O.P. Also, Fr. Molano encourages everyone to attend the series of monthly lectures on Dominican spirituality starting in November.

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St. Dominic’s Timeline

1170 - Dominic de Guzman is born in Caleruega, Spain.
1190 - Dominic is appointed to the canonry at Osma.
1215 - Dominic goes to the Lateran Council.
1216 - Dominic set out for Rome to complete the foundation.
1220 - The first General Chapter of the Order is held in Bologna.
1221 - Death of St. Dominic

San Francisco Dominican History:

1850 - Dominicans arrive in San Francisco when the Most Reverend Joseph Sadoc Alemany, Father Sadoc Francis Vilarrasa and Mother Mary of the Cross Goemere arrived from Spain.
1853 - The Archdiocese of San Francisco was created and Archbishop Alemany was its first incumbent.
1863 - First Dominican Priory in San Francisco is established.
1863 - Dominican order pays $6,000 for the city block bounded by Steiner, Bush, Pierce and Pine Streets.
1876 - The Priory of St. Dominic is formally established.
1906 - The Great Earthquake destroys St. Dominic’s Church.
1928 - Current St. Dominic’s Church is completed.