

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Q: Is the Priestly Fraternity of St. Dominic a religious order?

A: The Priestly Fraternity of St. Dominic is not a religious order in itself but rather is a part of the Order of Preachers, also known as the Dominican Order, founded by the Castilian priest St. Dominic de Guzmán in 1215–1216. Canonically, the Priestly Fraternity of St. Dominic is the branch of the Dominican Third Order for diocesan priests (canon 303 *CIC/83*). The Priestly Fraternity of St. Dominic is united with the Order of Preachers. In its progress in Dominican life, it relies upon the major superiors of the Order, that is, the Prior Provincial of the Province and the Master of the Order, head of the whole Dominican Family and successor to Saint Dominic.

Q. Is the Priestly Fraternity of St. Dominic approved by the Order of Preachers?

A: As the Priestly Fraternity of St. Dominic is united with the Order of Preachers, it is wholly approved by the Order and it relies upon the major superiors of the Order in its progress in Dominican life. The *Constitutions and Ordinations of the Brothers of the Order of Preachers* (in no. 150) state that the brothers should take the greatest

care to encourage the Priestly Fraternity of St. Dominic, setting up ways of reciprocal collaboration with it, so that the ministry of the Order may become ever more effective in the Church and the world.

Q: Why isn't the Priestly Fraternity called the 'Third Order' ?

A: In 1968—and later confirmed by legislation of the 1974 General Chapter—the Order of Preachers terminated the traditional use of the terms First Order, Second Order, and Third Order within the Order of Preachers. Traditionally, the First Order was composed of the Dominican friars (priests and brothers), the Second Order was composed of the Dominicans nuns (cloistered religious), and the Third Order was composed of the Third Order Religious (active, apostolic sisters) and the Third Order Secular (lay men and women and diocesan priests). In 1964, separate *Rules* were formed for the laity and for diocesan priests. Instead of the term 'Third Order', the terms 'Lay Fraternity' and 'Priestly Fraternity' are now used.

Q: Fraternities? Fraternity? Chapters? What's the difference?

A: What was formerly known as the “Dominican Third

Order” is now organized into separate associations, the *Lay Fraternities of St. Dominic* (also known as the *Dominican Laity*) and the *Priestly Fraternities of St. Dominic*. Together these two associations form the former “Third Order.” Each of the worldwide Fraternities (lay and priestly) are made up of individual fraternities, or chapters. Each chapter is led by a president (for the laity) or by a prior (for the priests). These individual fraternities, or chapters, are organized usually by parish (for the laity) or by diocese or even province (for the priests). In addition to the *Rule of Life*, each province has its own *Particular (or Local) Directory* which outlines norms for each chapter.

It should be noted that the word *chapter* is used differently in the Lay and Priestly Fraternities than with religious friars, sisters, or nuns. Whereas a *religious chapter* is an official gathering of the members, with the religious superior presiding, to discuss or come to a decision about matters concerning the common and apostolic life of the religious house and with its good administration, a *chapter* in the Lay and Priestly Fraternities is simply the local branch of the worldwide Fraternities, each with a local president/prior and council.

Q: Are members of the Priestly Fraternity Dominican priests?

A: Professed members of the Priestly Fraternity of St. Dominic are indeed sons of St. Dominic and are fully and definitively members of the Dominican Family and enjoy its spiritual benefits. Professed priests are not Dominican friars but rather “Dominican diocesan priests.” Members of the Dominican Family include the friars, nuns, sisters, members of the Dominican Secular Institutes, Lay Dominicans, and the members of the Priestly Fraternity. As priests of the Priestly Fraternity are not Dominican friars, the use of the full Dominican habit is limited to specified occasions by the Prior Provincial and his Council in order to avoid any possible confusion among the faithful. Furthermore, the use of the post-nominal initials “O.P.” are not used in any context or manner that might lead to confusion about canonical status of the priest (that is, as a secular priest and not a Dominican friar).

Q: Who can join the Priestly Fraternity of St. Dominic?

A: Only diocesan (secular) priests in good standing in their own diocese are permitted to join the Priestly Fraternity of

St. Dominic. Seminarians and transitional deacons must wait until after their priestly ordination to join the Priestly Fraternity. Seminarians, transitional deacons, and priests who are currently members of the Dominican Lay Fraternity will transfer their membership to the Priestly Fraternity after ordination to the priesthood. Permanent deacons normally join the Dominican Lay Fraternity; however, the Prior Provincial, on presentation by the council of a chapter of the Priestly Fraternity may grant a dispensation to allow a permanent deacon to be admitted to the chapter of the Priestly Fraternity. A deacon so admitted is understood to be dispensed from those obligations which are not compatible with his state.

Q: Can any diocesan priest join the Priestly Fraternity?

A: Diocesan priests in good standing in their own diocese and who can provide a Letter of Suitability attesting this are able to join the Priestly Fraternity. Normally it is asked that a priest be ordained for at least one year before entering the Priestly Fraternity. Every diocesan priest has the right to associate with others to pursue purposes in keeping with the clerical state. Diocesan priests, in accord with Canon Law, are to hold in esteem those associations which, having statutes recognized by competent authority,

foster their holiness in the exercise of the ministry through a suitable and properly approved rule of life and through fraternal assistance and which promote the unity of clerics among themselves and with their own bishop (canon 278 *CIC/83*). The Priestly Fraternity of St. Dominic is such an association.

Q: What will my bishop think of the Priestly Fraternity?

A: The 2004 *Directory for the Pastoral Ministry of Bishops (Apostolorum Successores)*, issued by the Congregation for Bishops, directs bishops to encourage as much as possible the common life of priests, which expresses the collegial dimension of the sacramental ministry, recapturing the tradition of apostolic life for the sake of a more fruitful ministry. The *Directory* also encourages bishops to support and value those priestly associations which may exist in his diocese (such as the Priestly Fraternity of St. Dominic). On the basis of statutes recognized by the competent ecclesiastical authority and through appropriate programs of spiritual life and fraternal assistance, these associations promote the sanctification of the clergy in the exercise of their ministry and strengthen the bonds which unite the priest with his bishop and with the particular Church to which they belong. If

your bishop has already given permission for the erection of a house of the Order of Preachers in his diocese (canon 312 §2 *CIC/83*), that permission included the permission for the establishment of a chapter of the Priestly Fraternity in that house or a church attached to it, whether he knew that or not at the time he gave his permission.

Q: Do members of the Priestly Fraternity take promises or vows?

A: Priests who persevere in their intention and decide to follow the way of Saint Dominic, so that they may be more strongly united with Christ the Priest, make profession in the Order of Preachers in due time. By this act, which proceeds from a lively faith and a deeper consciousness of their Baptism and Ordination, they promise to make their lifestyle subject to a special rule of perfection and become sons of Saint Dominic. Priests who make profession in the Order promise that they will live according to the *Rule of the Priestly Fraternities of Saint Dominic* until death. That the priests of Saint Dominic may embrace their own obligations “not as slaves under the law, but as free men under grace”, it is defined that individual transgressions of the *Rule* do not constitute moral fault. Professed members who, motivated by a desire for a greater consecration of

themselves, want to practice the evangelical counsels through the three vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience, can make these vows freely and privately.

The term “profession” is used differently in the rite for religious (e.g., the friars) than for the members of the Priestly Fraternity of St. Dominic. The term as used in the Priestly Fraternity indicates the intention of taking up the evangelical way of life by diocesan priests who, joined to the Order by their proper bond, participate in its spirit and mission, according to the form of living in the world adapted by the Order to their secular status. Religious profession by the friars of the Order of Preachers binds them to live the evangelical counsels, renouncing certain things of undoubted value without detriment to true human development.

Q: Do professed members of the Priestly Fraternity remain incardinated in their own diocese?

A: Yes, diocesan priests who make profession in the Order of Preachers through the Priestly Fraternity of St. Dominic remain incardinated in their own diocese and under the jurisdiction of their own bishop. The Order provides them with spiritual aids and directs them to their own

sanctification but it leaves them free for complete service in their diocese. Professed members, in union with their bishop, should be ready at all times to work wherever a greater pastoral need demands it.

Q: Are professed members required to live together in community?

A: Some practice of common life is highly recommended to all clerics (canon 280 *CIC/83*). However, professed members of the Priestly Fraternity are not required to live together in community. Professed members, however, constitute a part of the Dominican Family and belong to a special brotherhood. This brotherhood should always be a living reality and manifests itself in regular common gatherings. Professed members also come together with their Dominican brethren—the friars—who gladly and joyfully receive them into their priories and houses, so that professed priests become sharers of the graces and blessings of the Order in a visible way.

Q: How many professed members of the Priestly Fraternity are there?

A: There are currently 426 members of the Priestly Fraternity in 23 countries, including Africa (Angola), Asia (Philippines), Australia, Europe (Spain, France, Italy, England, Switzerland, Bohemia), North America (USA and Puerto Rico), South America (Mexico, Argentina) and Central America (Honduras).

Source: <https://www.opfraternity.org/faq>