There are two aspects to ‘looking forward’, which I want to refer to in this short talk, whilst taking the word ‘Apostolic’ in its fullest reference to being sent on a mission to preach the Good News of our salvation, through the profound love of God manifested in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Firstly, looking forward means acting with hope and conviction that God is with us in our endeavours; and, secondly, it means envisaging that future, imagining what present trends will help or hinder us in our efforts.

At our latest full meeting on 23rd July we had been invited by Fr Paul Daly, the Episcopal Vicar of the Diocese of Salford, who has been appointed by Bishop John Arnold, to be our liaison person with the Diocese, to consider, discuss and propose ways in which the Diocese can be of assistance to the North West Lay Dominican Fraternal Group.

We came up with the following suggestions:

• Engage speakers on themes of interest to young people, students and young married couples.

• Request the use of Parish noticeboards to advertise our presence and activities planned in the diocese, and to distribute leaflets and other specially designed material.

• To be permitted to have speakers to be advertised and appear at meetings in the Parishes

• We should attract high-level, charismatic speakers for these events, drawing on Ray’s wide range of contact especially.

• Aim to target a wide range of people, especially non-Christians using broad powerful themes to attract audiences, such as items of psychology, philosophy and theology

• There is scope for creating ‘green shoots’, especially in the setting of University Chaplaincies, where a group of half a dozen people can spring up for a particular purpose, but endure as a group beyond that, with potential for growth.

• Such groups may develop an aim outside themselves, such a social action, such as food collection and distribution to the needy.

• Draw on an innate desire for learning, to attract people to appropriately-sized discussion groups on attractive themes, in a non-threatening, friendly environment.

• The sisters (and Brothers) may be interested in helping with small discussion groups, as they are often very charismatic, and youngsters might be encouraged to hear for the first time what St Thomas Aquinas has to offer by way of philosophy and theology.

• Think about the points of contact for our addresses – how to make the greatest impact.

• Growth can be fostered outside church structures

• Think of arresting titles for talks

• The social dimension a potentially prolific area for discussion

• The richness of life a Lay Dominican would be a worthwhile theme.

• We would look to Ray for a lead on where specifically our main effort should be directed

• We should remember the dioceses that we represent, outside those where we currently meet, such as the diocese covering Cumbria, and others.

We had also realised that we might need more resources from outside our own small Fraternal Group, and we thought that this forum today would be ideal for raising this possibility: So I am asking now, and for future reference, for discussion in our smaller groups here, or elsewhere, how would the Groups or Fraternities here feel about coming in to help us if the need arose?

Whilst we all do our best individually to proclaim the Gospel in our daily lives, I am sure that we all feel a need to focus our activities on preaching to a wider world, as Fraternal Groups and Fraternities, and as a Province.

I will now hand over to Teresa who will develop further thoughts on similar themes.

Peter has given an accurate overview of our discussions on how we can increase the Dominican presence in the North West. Not only that however. There is a growing desire to spread the Gospel of the Word to a wider audience; to engage with those who may not share our faith, but with whom we interact on a daily basis. As Peter has said, "we all feel a need to focus our activities on preaching to a wider world, as Fraternities and as a Province.

The question is, how do we do this?

Our Master of the Order, Fr. Gerard, has asked us to become missionaries, following the example St. Dominic gave us. And so, wherever we find ourselves, we need to really listen and hear what the other is saying. We should learn their language. By language I mean the 'world view' language of the other. Only then can we begin to truly communicate. We need to go forth in the spirit of friendship.

Fr. Martin, our Provincial, has spoken movingly about how, in our increasingly secular society, the Church's influence and impact is weakening. He looks to us, Lay Dominicans, to be a strong bridge, connecting the Church with the wider world.

In order to become that 'bridge of missionaries', we need:

1 Ongoing formation to mature in our faith

2 Collaboration between lays and clerics, and

3 The recognition of the joy and nourishment of fraternal friendship and communication

So, some thoughts and suggestions.

1) We all have gifts and life-experience to offer, even those of us of a certain age! It is easy to stay within our own comfort zone, (particularly post-pandemic), scary to move out of it. Let us be courageous!

2) Online meetings have proved to be very successful, particularly for those physically unable to meet face-to-face. Perhaps the Council could consider organising online meetings, across the Province, where people can meet others from different Fraternities. Continued engagement and valuing is very important.

3) One of our enquirers asks us to be more public-facing. Let us look outward, that is, towards the public, rather than preaching to the choir continuously.

4) One of our members reminded us of two things that were trending in the 1990's. The first was working in collaboration. How does the Dominican family as a whole, in all its parts, preach? Do we have a venture that all parts of the family are striving to complete? So perhaps, rather than having lots of smaller projects, which may or may not succeed, could we not join together, as a province, collaborating on one or two projects?

Secondly, on-going formation for all. This idea met with some opposition. I think and hope this is not the case now! As our member says,

"How difficult it is to live out our calling: attend mass each day, recite the office, pray the rosary, recognise the sign of the times, study Church teaching, attend fraternity meetings, etc. I fail! But, I hope, joyfully."

I suggest that we continue the good work, led by our sister, Felice, in having on-going formation events across the Province.

Finally, the joy of God is attractive and infectious. Let us continue taking part in a conversation that transforms us and transforms us into friends.