# Lay Dominicans: Report for Seminar (March 2023)

In October 2022 we held a chapter meeting and a new Lay Provincial Council was elected. There are 8 members of the council, and the new council consists of 4 people who served on the previous council and 4 new people, which I think is a really good mix.

I’d like to start with thanks to Alison Fincham, my predecessor as President, and the out-going council. They did not have an easy few years, particularly with the disruption caused by COVID, and I know they are, rightly, particularly proud of the way in which they built contacts between the fraternities, with Alison visiting many of them, and increasing contact on-line.

The great highlight of the last year was the visit of the Master of the Order for the Jubilee celebrations. The Lay Dominicans met with him at Oxford, and every fraternity and fraternal group was represented, so we were able to share with the Master the experiences of the whole province.

Some numbers since the last seminar:

* This time last year there were 7 fraternities, 4 fraternal groups (groups which do not currently have enough professed members to operate as a fraternity, e.g. to elect a fraternity council) and 2 further groups in the early stages of development. Since then, the Fraternal Group at Crawley has become a fraternity, and the 2 new groups (Lymington and Yorkshire) continue their development.
* This time last year there were 117 fully professed Lay Dominicans, 21 temporarily professed and 11 admitted but not yet professed – a total of 149.
* In the last year we have had 5 final professions, 3 temporary professions and 13 admissions.

These figures do not tell the whole story – although the previous council collected accurate figures for the visit of the Master back in May, we do not have a sufficiently robust system for collecting and maintaining records. This is something the new council will be working on, but in the meantime, the figures I have just quoted are only those where fraternities sent news of their admissions and professions to be published on the website.

But if the figures don’t tell the whole story, I do think that they tell a very positive story. The number of Lay Dominicans in our province is rising. We have new groups forming and existing groups developing and in some cases re-establishing themselves. Presidents of fraternities have asked for help and ideas in how we make our presence known in local areas and dioceses, and we’re having a Zoom call with them next week to share ideas and experiences.

A moment ago I mentioned the website. At last year’s seminar, I spoke about how we had recently relaunched the Lay Dominicans website. We are beginning to see a good flow of news from the fraternities, and we are now publishing reflections written by Lay Dominicans, which I think is a good opportunity for our preaching. Since I spoke last year, we have also relaunched our Facebook page. Before the relaunch, in May 2022, the page had 1178 likes. It now has just under 5000, many of whom seem to be Lay Dominicans from all round the world. Teresa, who is the Communications Officer on the Council has lots of ideas for new content for our sites, and she is also working on re-establishing a more traditional newsletter, a couple of times a year, as we know that not everyone finds it easy to access things on-line.

Some of the other things the new Council is working on:

* Sara, who is the Formation Officer, has established a network for the formation officers in fraternities and is having regular Zoom calls. This is with a real emphasis on on-going formation, not just programmes for new enquirers.
* We are also planning more regional study days, as not everyone can travel to national events. The next one is in Edinburgh in July. Catherine is the Events Officer, but fraternities themselves are involved in planning these events.
* Andy has the task of updating our Directory, which sits alongside the Rule of Lay Fraternities and gives the detail of how things are done in this province. This is a piece of work started by the previous council. The first draft resulted in a lot of feedback and responses from fraternities, and that’s what Andy is taken forward.

And not forgetting the essential work on the council from Gigi the secretary, Philip the Treasurer and Fernando (who can’t be here this weekend) the Vice-President.

One other thing I wanted to mention. Last year, Philip and Felice attended the meeting of the European Council of Lay Dominican Fraternities in Vilnius. It’s the first time in a few years that anyone from our province has been able to attend, and everyone there was so pleased to see them. From that meeting came a real wish to think about our contacts with the Lay Dominicans elsewhere, and this is something we will be thinking about. Closer links with the Irish province seems to be a good first step.

So, by way of conclusion, I’m looking forward to getting to know the fraternities and groups better in the coming year. I think we have a good mix of active fraternities, each with their own character, and a wish to work together across the province when it’s helpful to do so. We seem to have a lot going on, a lot for the new council to work on, and it feels as if we are in a very positive period of growth and development.