“... to sustain the fundamental right of every person to pursue the fullness of life and to share in the common good.”

—Constitution of Sisters of St. Dominic of St. Catherine of Siena - Article 8
Editor's note:

A Dogged Quest for Justice
Chris Broslawski, OP

It is uncommon for our sisters to have dogs. And, if we do, it is because the dog was a gift, a rescue or an adoption. I have a dog, a rescue; our now former president, S. Sharon has a dog, a gift.

There is also a dog that inhabits Dominican lore. Jane de Gúzman, while pregnant with Dominic, had a dream about a dog bearing a torch. The story continues to be told and embellished, and much meaning is drawn from this image.

Domini canes (Latin) “the Lord’s dogs,” parallels a reference to the Order of Preachers as Dominicans, “Dominicans.” The fire of the torch brings light to the world. The image is a symbol of enkindling the world with the fiery words of a preacher. Or, bearing a torch brings light to that which is good and holy in our world and calls us to pass it on.

Passing on the torch and bringing light to the world, then, are the prevailing themes in this issue of DOMINICAN ROOTS. You will read about a change in leadership and the values that are fostered and provided in each of our ministries. The featured ministry in the edition of ROOTS is Siena Retreat Center.

Amazing what a woman’s dream can conjure up, isn’t it? Thank you for your continued interest in our dream, a dogged quest for justice.

S. Chris is director of sponsored ministries for the Racine Dominicans and editor of Dominican Roots.

President’s note:

Passing the Torch
Sharon Simon, OP

Passing the Olympic torch from one relay runner to the next until it reaches its final destination is a meaningful symbolic gesture. Passing a torch is a worthy metaphor for life. Generations pass to the next: businesses are handed on, relationships grow, and faith is shared. And so the torch of leadership in our community is being passed on this summer. S. Maryann McMahon, a gifted leader, a faith-filled Dominican woman, will guide our community in the next steps of the journey.

During a Chapter of Elections, the agenda includes setting priorities. Such directives hold leadership and community members mutually accountable.

For the next four years, God’s call and our desire to embrace the evolving future will have us focus on collaborating courageously, committing to a contemplative presence, engaging in a study of our legacy, and holding intentional discussions around membership issues and associate relationships.

Engaging in the legacy study will have us focus on relationships to properties, ministries and personnel. This will necessarily include our connection with the sponsored ministries. In this newsletter you will read updates from the six ministries with Siena Retreat Center highlighted. A new edifice of bricks and mortar has been provided, but tending the heart is core to this ministry.

We embrace the future together always aware of God’s enduring Spirit.

S. Sharon, president of Racine Dominicans, ended her twelve year tenure in leadership on June 30, 2014.

Ecology Camp at the Farm
Rooted in Hope, the Racine Dominican Eco-Justice Center is dedicated to care of Earth and to that end events and activities include environmental education. Ecology Camp at the Farm is featured through June and July. Ecology camps are week-long experiences for youth ages 11-14 and children 6-10. Participants connect with a variety of animals (alpacas, goats, chickens, ducks, geese, rabbits, etc.), get their hands into the soil, and explore the eco-systems. Other activities include outdoor cooking, Native American traditions, crafts of all kinds, and much more. Sorry… all sessions are filled!

The Eco-Justice Center staff, naturalists, and volunteers lead the camps. The Eco-Justice staff directly involved in the camps includes S. Janet Weyker, director; Kate Kirby, assistant to the director and a 2012 graduate of St. Mary’s, South Bend, IN; S. Rose Marie Dischler; and Laura Sonberg, an intern from Alverno College, Milwaukee. Nan Calvert is the naturalist on the team this year. Volunteers are many and too numerous to name.

Programs and activities reflect the purpose of the community that lives and works at the center. The sisters and staff model sustainable, simple living while reverencing the land and all who have inhabited it before them. Protecting the land, and the plant and animal species living on the 15-acre property, is vital to the Racine Dominican Eco-Justice Center.

These, then, are the values we hope to pass on to future generations.
Siena Retreat Center’s mission is to nurture a spirituality of healing and wholeness in an environment of peace, joy, and beauty.

A Place to Awaken Authenticity

The human family recently grieved the loss and celebrated the gifts of Nelson Mandela and Maya Angelou, two individuals who taught so much about the pain, courage, joy, and mystery of being human.

Angelou and Mandela were born on different hemispheres and walked very different paths—Angelou, a poet, novelist, and civil rights activist; Mandela, an apartheid-era human rights advocate, elected president of South Africa—yet both lived with the authenticity that comes from a spiritually-awake and spiritually-fruitful life.

Those who come to Siena Retreat Center find the spiritual nourishment that awakens and enlivens them, which is why so many return time and again. It is as though the beautiful and peaceful outdoor space evokes the beauty and peace within each person. This can happen through the simplicity of a bird’s song or in the complexity of an engaging speaker’s presentation. Along the waters of Lake Michigan, in the winter’s snow, and amid the biodiversity of the ravines, retreatants re-calibrate their “inner compass,” allowing the heart to be heard, resentments to be released, and dreams to be born.

The transformations are as numerous as the hungering people bring. Some have brought a hunger to share the joys of life; others have brought a hunger to express deep sorrow. Each is a path to greater authenticity. Sometimes retreatants are surprised by what they discover inside themselves—“strength I did not know I had,” “a deeper peace,” “courage and guidance to go forward.”

Spiritual flourishing looks different for each person, as is evident in the lives of Maya Angelou and Nelson Mandela. Those who come to Siena Retreat Center are transformed and nourished in so many ways, and, like Angelou and Mandela, such awakening cannot help but spill over into communities and societies of healing and wholeness, justice and truth, and ever-greater authenticity.

Some Recent Retreats

“Compassion is a way of life that requires daily focus on personal transformation.”

- Joyce Rupp

Siena Retreat Center recently hosted Joyce Rupp, a nationally-known speaker and author, who presented “Boundless Compassion,” a five-day exploration on themes related to compassion. Joyce will return to Siena offering “Boundless Compassion” in October 2015.

“People are asking for an answer... The answer is in us, in our hearts. We have to reframe our thinking as to how we are to solve the problems of the world.”

- John Nichols

John Nichols, a widely-respected journalist, author, and political commentator, draws a crowd each year at Siena Retreat Center. John Nichols will return in March 2015.

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“The art of basket-making unites poetry, technique and spirit...”

- Kathleen Bohn, OP

Kathleen Bohn, OP, a Racine Dominican, is on the staff of Siena Retreat Center. She is a spiritual guide, labyrinth facilitator, weaver, and is deeply committed to Earth. Basket- and loom-weaving retreats are scheduled individually. Both involve learning the essentials and daily conversation with a spiritual guide.
Volunteers playing with the children.

Sara DeGrave is one of the counselors at HOPES Center.

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The spring musical, 42nd Street, was directed by Fr. Roetzer along with Mrs. Payton, choreographer, and Mr. Ruelle, band director. Beneath these few memories is a torch that continues to be carried now and into the future by dedicated lay women and men who believe in the value of Catholic education.
Another edition of Dominican Roots brought to you by Racine Dominicans.

Read about the role of dogs in Dominican life and lore.