



# MONASTERY BELLS

LIFE WITH THE CLOISTERED DOMINICAN NUNS

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MONASTERY OF THE INFANT JESUS

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*"I have called you by name, you are mine." Isaiah 43:1*

A vocation is a calling from God for a specific purpose. Everyone in the world has a vocation to some form of life—whether it is married life, single life, or consecrated life. Additionally, God calls every person to a kind of work they are best suited for, so we sometimes talk about a person having a "vocation" to be a doctor or nurse, or a person doing "vocational" studies in high school. The call from God comes in many ways, and we each have to discern what vocation God is calling us to live.

As cloistered Dominican nuns, we are called to live a consecrated life in our monastery here in Lufkin, TX. Let's examine this more closely.



First, we are Dominicans, part of the Order of Preachers. We preach through our way of life: our liturgy, our silent prayers and written words, our sacrifices and penances. Through these means, we can reach the entire world without ever leaving the monastery grounds. Our holy father St. Dominic established us for this purpose in 1206, and we continue to pray and work for the salvation of souls as nuns of the Order have for over 800 years.

Second, we are cloistered nuns. In fact, we have what is called "papal enclosure", which is the strictest form of enclosure in the Church. We do not go out except for serious matters, and we only let in those persons specified. This is so that we have "leisure to devote [ourselves] wholeheartedly to the kingdom of God." (Nuns' Constitutions) Prayer has power, and in order to keep our prayer concentrated, free of distraction and worldly care, we keep a certain distance from the world while still being concerned about it.



Our vocation is not exactly a common one, since it involves following Christ in a radical way. Because of this, we have a period of formation for young women who are interested in becoming cloistered Dominican nuns.



Our Constitutions state that the novice ("novus"=new, a beginner) should "live in a separate place within the monastery". At the Monastery of the Infant Jesus, we have an entire building dedicated to novitiate life. It has everything the sisters in formation require: bedrooms (which we refer to as "monastic cells"), a community room, an oratory (a place where you pray), a library/classroom, a computer room, and cabinets brimming with all kinds of useful items for most needs. The novitiate is a self-contained world—lacking only a kitchen. But since the sisters in formation eat with the rest of the community in the refectory, this is not a problem!



The novices have their own recreation period after dinner (although they join the professed Sisters most evenings). Recreation is a time when the novices can enjoy each other's company while working on special projects, crafts and handwork, or just relaxing after a busy morning of work, classes and



prayers. Sometimes they work on puzzles. Other times they recreate outdoors: taking walks, playing basketball, rollerblading, or flying kites! The possibilities are many!

Our novitiate is really looking good these days. In September, we had a new floor put in to replace the old and cracked original flooring that was installed in 1962, so it was time for an update! Installing the new floor meant moving everything out—all the beds, desks, chairs, tables, bookshelves and lots and lots of books. We are so grateful to the Knights of Columbus and our own workmen who helped us move everything out—and then moved it all back in again after the floor was finished. We also paved the novitiate courtyard and put in a new drain.



Our Knights!



Novice Directress and aspirant in Community Room with new floor

*For your enjoyment and to promote vocations, we invite you to view our documentary on YouTube! You may click on YouTube and type in "Monastery of the Infant Jesus", or check the link on our website and blog. Thanks so much to Reg Reynolds and Elaine Jackson who made it possible!*

*Like clay in the hand of the potter, so are you in my hand. Jeremiah 18:6*

The novitiate is primarily a place of formation for our new sisters. They live in the novitiate from their entrance as postulants until a year or so after first profession—a total of about four years. They are not alone in the novitiate, of course—we have a novice directress who lives with them and assists them in their quest to become Dominican nuns. She teaches classes, provides spiritual direction and practical help as the new members of our community move through the stages of cloistered life.

And what are these stages?

**ASPIRANCY:** After a few visits on the “outside” in the parlor, a woman who truly “aspires” to a religious vocation may make a request to experience life “inside” the monastery. This period (from a couple of weeks to several months) is called the aspirancy. During this time, the candidate comes inside the enclosure and lives the contemplative life, as she and the community discern whether she is being called to a commitment to our way of monastic life. At the end of the aspirancy, the woman returns to her regular life to consider what she has experienced and to decide if she wishes to apply.



**POSTULANCY:** The postulancy is a time when a young woman “gradually comes to experience the goal and the means of our contemplative life” (Nuns’ Constitutions). She enters the monastery with the intention of staying, and as a sign of her commitment, she wears a special uniform, which currently at our monastery is a simple blue skirt and vest, white blouse and blue veil. The postulancy usually



lasts about 12 months. During this time the postulant is assigned work in various departments within the monastic enclosure, attends special classes in the novitiate on basic topics such as the Rule of St. Augustine, Religious Vocation, and the Life of St. Dominic, and becomes accustomed to the liturgical life of the nuns. She also gets to know the sisters better.



**NOVITIATE:** The transition from postulant to novice is dramatic, because the novice receives the Dominican habit. This takes place in a private ceremony in the Chapter Hall. From now on she looks almost the same as the other sisters, except that she wears a white veil and does not have a ring. She also receives her new religious name, which is kept secret and is always a source of much speculation and anticipation. The novitiate lasts two years and is a more intense time of training and learning about Dominican monastic life and the vows which the novice hopes to profess. Besides these, the classes include Scripture, prayer, and Dominican history and spirituality. The novice continues to work in different areas throughout the monastery.



A novice makes her temporary profession of vows for three years in a public ceremony in the chapel. After this, she wears the black veil instead of the novice’s white veil. A sister in temporary vows remains in the novitiate for a year following her first profession while pursuing her studies and work assignments. At the end of the year, the sister in first vows “moves over” to the professed dormitory, where she is gradually integrated into the life of a solemnly professed sister. She assumes



**TEMPORARY PROFESSION:**

more work responsibilities and begins to attend our community meetings. She also continues her studies privately and eventually participates in the Monastic Theological Studies program offered by the Association of Dominican Nuns.



**SOLEMN PROFESSION:**

Upon completion of temporary profession, the nun pronounces her solemn vows during a public ceremony in the chapel. At this time, her black veil is blessed and she receives a gold ring, symbolizing her union with Christ. Now the sister is completely integrated into the community. She works, prays, attends



meetings, and has a vote in Chapter matters. It seems like the end of a long journey, but in fact, it’s the beginning of an exciting new chapter in a nun’s life.

*In all we do, from our first day at the monastery until the last, we rely on the help of our many friends and benefactors who make our life here possible. Without the generous people who aid us in so many ways we could not live our life as we do. Thank you so much! God bless you!*