

The Southern Star

ISSUE #35

Newsletter for the Dominican Sisters of Wanganui



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Grotto of Saint Mary Magdalene,
La Sainte Baume



"Learn from Magdalene to put all your hope in Him so that you may fear nothing in seeking Him, loving Him above all things, and disdaining all things for love of Him."

- Origen's Homily on Mary Magdalene

LETTER FROM MOTHER PRIORESS

Sainte Marie Madeleine, fidèle amie du Seigneur; toi l'apôtre des apôtres, conduis nous vers ton Sauveur. "Saint Mary Magdalene, faithful friend of the Lord, Apostle of the Apostles, lead us towards your Saviour", sings the chorus of the hymn we always sing after Mass on St Mary Magdalene's feast day. As the contemplative, the 'faithful friend' who always spent as much time as possible with Our Lord, and the apostle who was the first to bring to the other Apostles the good news of the resurrection, St Mary Magdalene is one of the protectresses of the Dominican Order. Besides celebrating her feast this year as usual, with a school sung Mass and the interhouse netball competition, we and our pupils have been striving to imitate her in this most perfect way of life which, as St Thomas says, moves from contemplation to action 'not by subtraction but by addition'.

This year the Form 3-6 classes had their first taste of full-time contemplation in a three-day retreat, in which Father Themann and Father Stephens helped them to strengthen their friendship with Our Lord by conversation and time spent with Him. Then, along with the Form 1-2s, who had their day of recollection earlier in the year, and the Form 7s, who had theirs during the summer holidays, they had an opportunity to share with others the fruits of their contemplation by singing at the Big Sing competition events in Palmerston North and Hastings.



On the feast of St Dominic, we celebrated the 25th anniversary of our own apostolate, St Dominic's College. The festivities began with a Sung Mass and ended with solemn Vespers, Rosary and Benediction, again reminding us, and all the past and present teachers and pupils who attended, that the contemplative life is the 'one thing necessary', the source of all our activity, and the 'better part, which shall not be taken away' even when we reach heaven.

St Mary Magdalene never forgot those words, in which Our Lord had defended her way of spending time with Him, and some time after His ascension she retired to a cave in the South of France, now called the *Sainte Baume* (holy cave, portrayed on the front cover of this newsletter), where she spent the rest of her life in contemplation. In 1295, the Dominican Order was given care of this Shrine of

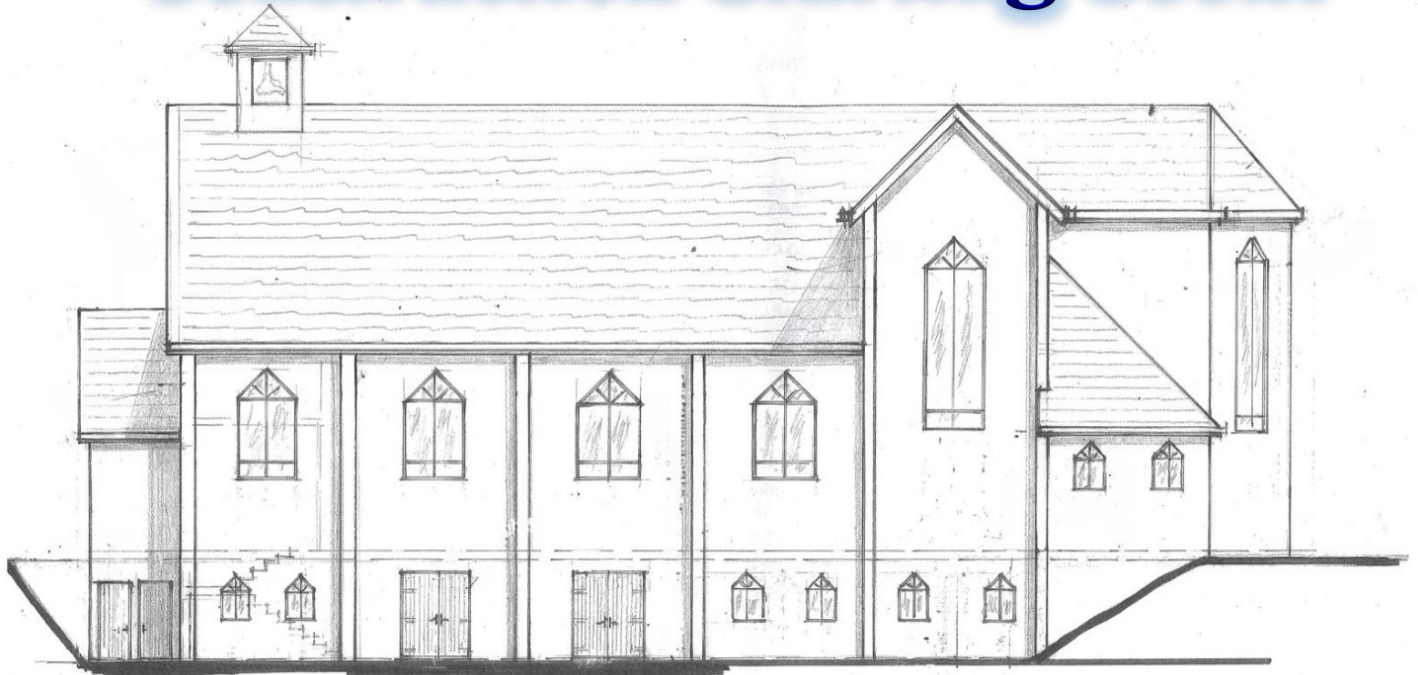
St. Mary Magdalene and are still the guardians of it to this day.

These past few months saw us finalising the plans of our own "Sainte Baume" – the chapel which will be the heart of our contemplative life. The architect's elevation drawings can be seen on the next page. We appeal to your generosity to help make this project a reality this summer, as our builder hopes to excavate and lay the foundations during the dry weather.

The eve of St Mary Magdalene's feast, July 21, saw the departure of our travelling preacher, Father Albert O.P., who had spent three weeks with us as our fill in chaplain. During this time,

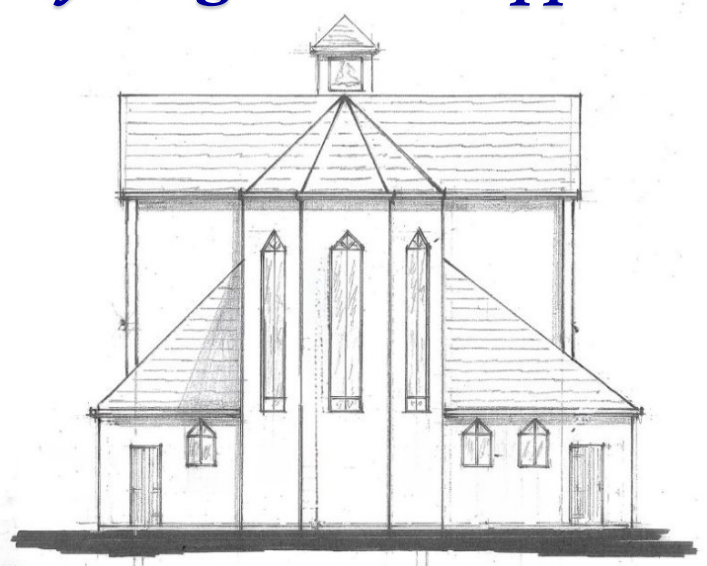
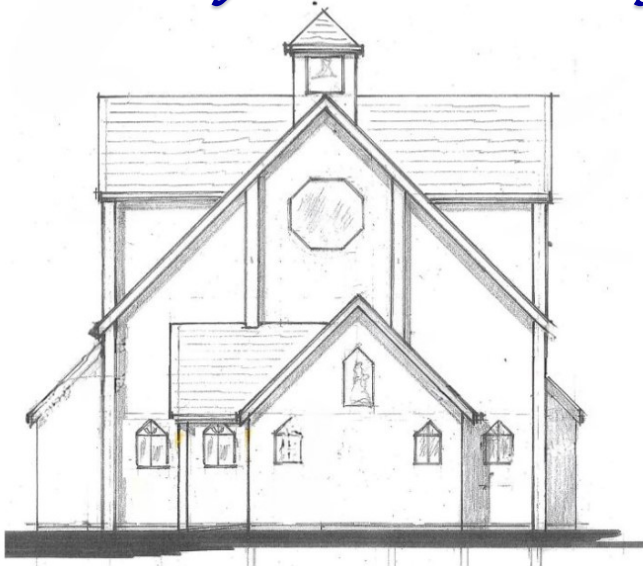
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Construction Starting Soon!



Your donations will help to lay the foundations of our chapel this summer.

Thank you in advance for your generous support!



he preached a day of recollection to the ladies of the parish on mental prayer and one to Tertiaries on consecration to Our Lady. After the latter, three Dominican Tertiaries received the habit and two made profession. At the beginning of August, we also received a visit from Bishop Fellay, who, like Father Albert, spoke about Our Lady, giving the girls and the Sisters much to contemplate.

Francisco de Osuna, St Teresa of Avila's favourite spiritual writer, wrote of St Mary Magdalene that "Magdalene means *magnify*, and it is our will that magnifies and exults in God" by constantly contemplating Christ in our hearts. May we all be 'magnifiers' of God by continually deepening our friendship with Him and being ready to share that friendship with others. "*Saint Mary Magdalene, faithful friend of the Lord, Apostle of the Apostles, lead us towards your Saviour*"

History of 25 Years of St Dominic's College

adapted from Foundress' speech on 4th August

After I began attending the Society's Mass in Avondale, I got Father Gentili's phone number and rang him to ask to speak to him.

Father Gentili revealed that he was looking for some-one to start a secondary school. I said I had been teaching in secondary schools since 1973—it was then 1998—and I would love to help with his secondary school. So, this is where the story of St Dominic's College really begins, when our senior boys and girls were old enough for Form 3.

You will be wondering where we put these secondary school classes. The girls were in a room in the primary school, where I also slept. The boys that first year were in the small chapel-cum-library.

The next year, of course we needed double the amount of teaching spaces we had had in 1999. Happily, the Society was able to build two classrooms for the boys, and to pick up the Tennis Club for the girls. Before we could move into the tennis club we had to have about a month in the house I was living in at 72 Alma Road. It brought us closer together as a school but it was a relief when the Tennis club agreed to allow us to buy the use of the building. The girls loved the Tennis Club. The big windows gave them a view of the world – which they saw either directly by looking out the window or by seeing the world reflected in the whiteboard. Our final move was to the new school and convent at 12B York Street.

In 2013 we, the nuns, purchased 16 York Street from the Morgans to use as a boarding school. Because we found that we couldn't put the boarding school we had envisaged at 16 York Street because the house needed too much upgrading if it was to operate as a boarding school, we put the boarders in the Convent and the nuns in the Morgans' house. Now we have twenty-one nuns, including the novices, so we have built an accommodation block on our own land at 16 York Street, which at present also houses a temporary chapel, which is getting too small for us.

Now that we've dealt with the accommodation for the secondary school and for the nuns, we go on to the lay teaching-staff. In the first year of the existence of St Dominic's College, Father Delsorte had advertised in the USA for a teacher for the boys and we were lucky enough to get Anthony Magnoli, a man who could teach just about any subject. You may not know it, but now Mr Magnoli's daughter, Sophia, is teaching at St Dominic's.



We also had help from Jeff Peek (RIP) and Adrienne Borberg for music, two very talented people, which was good as the girls were very musical and I couldn't give them much in that line.

As we had only six girls in the first Third Form we recruited Gemma Cooney, who was home-schooling, as our seventh player to form a netball team. After a year of Sunday netball playing against the ladies of the parish on our court, which had been fixed up by Colin Smith (RIP) and associates, the girls won their grade in the opening day tournament.

In the subsequent history of St Dominic's College, I reverently note the spinning off of St Augustine's College for the boys. The name must be a thorn in the flesh for the Novus Ordo Diocese as the Marist Fathers ran a boys' school called "St Augustine's" here in Wanganui. Still, it's a nice Saint and a nice name for the boys' school. Dominicans live by the Holy Rule of St Augustine so there is a connection there.

Of course, in the early days of the school we had several lay teachers, as I was busy and the young Sisters were studying. The Lord certainly guided some very good teachers into our nets. These included Joan Howard Jones (RIP), the French teacher. Though she was Anglican she was so anxious to do the right thing that when Bishop Fellay came and offered her his ring on being introduced, she grasped his hand and curtsied. We also had Britt Paul, a very good Latin and French scholar. We also found Allan Hays, a French and English teacher.

I've already mentioned Mr Magnoli, but I should also mention Mr Bevan Petersen who has



Foundations for the current school at 12B York Street

taught in the girls' school as well as the boys' school and the primary school – he's very versatile. Mr Francis Halpin also deserves a mention. He's retired now but he did good service for us, mostly in the boys' school. Mr Leonard Ng has also taught in both the boys' and girls' schools. He and Bevan Petersen are still teaching and still doing good work! Two other valuable teachers were Bob Griffiths (RIP), who had been Head of Maths at Collegiate and Paul Garner, a military man well-known to you all.

We also had Jordan Viray, Danny Sheehan, Gary Kelly and Paul Bernetzke. Trevor Briggs was with us for a long time but eventually went back to Australia to get his little family some warmth. Mrs Rachel Bjerga did great teaching for us, especially in Literature. Julie Zarate was imported to help us, especially with Maths, and she was very good, but, alas, became Mrs Ben Nyssen. Previously Josephine Cameron did some very good work for us, but she quickly became Mrs Luke Nyssen.

Another imported teacher was Suzanne Koerner, who eventually became Mrs Joe Pawson. Andrea Pollock survived Wanganui but when we met her

again in Tynong she was married to a Catholic policeman. Eliska Kucirkova, a very able teacher, survived the antipodes but is now married to a Czech man.

Another very good opportunity that befell the school was the chance to do the Cambridge Examinations. We had heard that the New Zealand examination system was going to be revised. Then I was invited to an information evening about the new national examinations. There it was made obvious that the new system would just “dumb down” the qualifications available for secondary school students.

Fortunately, the very next week we received a letter from Auckland Grammar School inviting us to send representatives to a meeting to find out about the Cambridge International examinations. I said to Father Delsorte that he could say Mass in Auckland and then attend the Cambridge Meeting, which was on a Monday. He did so and came back very enthused about the people he had met and what they had to say about the Cambridge Exams.



Now we have six framed certificates on our staffroom wall representing occasions when our pupils or private candidates have come top in New Zealand or even (twice) top of the World. Cambridge qualifications are also internationally portable, which is good for our boarders.

And so, I think we've brought you up to date on the buildings, staffing and progress of St Dominic's College, Wanganui. I must finish by saying that we have been blessed during the last twenty-five years, not only with lovely staff, but with lovely pupils as well. They are well-mannered, well-behaved, and a joy to teach. I must say that they are a credit to their parents and to the primary school from which most of them come. May St Dominic's, St Augustine's, St Anthony's and your families continue to flourish.



Winter: News from St Dominic's Convent

"The Big Sing"



This year, St Dominic's College participated for the first time in New Zealand's national secondary school choir competition, *The Big Sing*. The competition has been running for over 30 years, and annually around 8,000 students from over 200 schools participate. School choirs initially compete in one of 10 regional festivals; after all ten of these have been completed, the adjudicators confer to select 30 choirs to participate in the National *Finale*, and an additional 36 to participate in the three greater regional *Cadenza* festivals, with 12 choirs in each *Cadenza*. Not knowing quite what to expect, 36 brave young souls from St Dominic's set off for the Manawatu-Whanganui regional competition, held at the Regent Theatre in Palmerston North on the 20th of June. Aiming to uplift their audience's souls with beautiful music, they were both surprised and delighted to be awarded the Renaissance Singers' trophy for the best *a capella* choral art song, for their performance of Victoria's *Domine, Non Sum Dignus*, as well as a Highly Commended Certificate for performance excellence. (They also performed arrangements of *Mo Maria*, a Maori Marian hymn, and *Don Oiche ud I mBeithil*, a Gaelic Christmas carol.)

Yet another surprise was to come; they were also selected for the Lower North Island *Cadenza* festival! However, the full two-day festival was to be held in Hastings this year (which is on the other side of the North Island), so accommodation, travel, food and supervision had to be sourced and



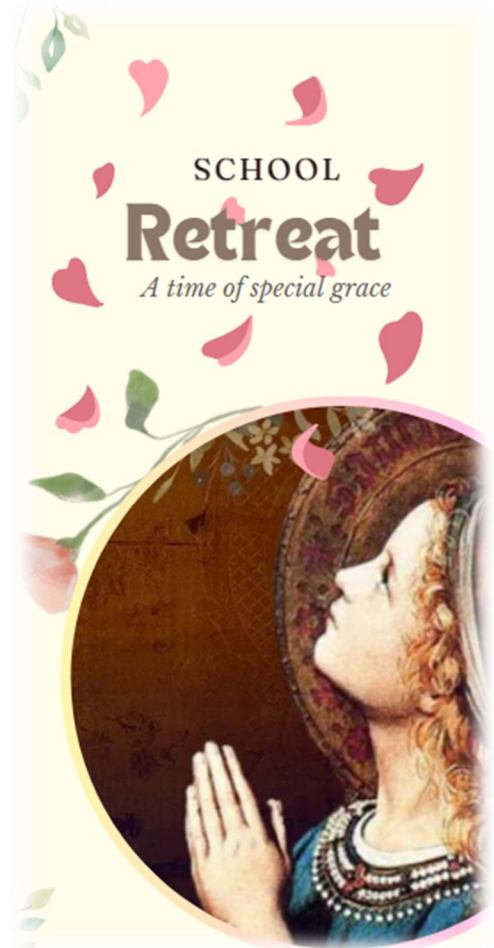
organised with little time to spare. In the end, thanks to the support of our priests and parents, we were able to attend, the girls having a wonderful opportunity to share their music-making with other young people, attend choral workshops with their adjudicator, Dr Igelese Ete, and perform two choral works *en masse* at the Gala Concert on the final evening. *Deo gratias!*

Inauguration of School Retreats



"It is better to be alone with God. His friendship will not fail me, nor His counsel, nor His love. In His strength I will dare and dare and dare until I die."

- St. Joan of Arc (quote from retreat information brochure)



"Sister, how will I be able to survive *three days* without talking?" This fear echoed throughout the Form 3 – 6 girls (13 – 17 years old) in varying degrees and manners. However, after the retreat, having very much survived, comments about the dreaded silence were transformed to "It actually wasn't that bad" and "It was the best 68 hours of my life!"



Yet this retreat period did much more than expel the girls' sedatephobia. It gave the girls an irreplaceable opportunity of becoming more than just acquainted with Our Lord. It gave them the opportunity to see what is necessary to achieve intimate friendship with God, and to obtain the grace to be

ready to do all that He asks of them in order to grow in this friendship.

Father T. Stephens was the retreat master for the Form 3 & 4 girls (13 – 15 years old). His conferences were interwoven with spiritual topics, practical advice and humour to show the girls that our spiritual life is truly part of our daily life not something we compartmentalise and only fulfil on Sundays.



From Beren's words of love towards Luthien, to the massive love story which is the history of humanity, Father D. Themann opened to the Form 5 and 6 girls (15 – 17 years old) the wonders of nature and grace, and how they work, not against, but alongside each other. After an instruction on mental prayer, Father spoke to the girls of the Incarnation and Redemption, highlighting the role of woman in this work. After this, they caught a glimpse of the chivalry of Jesus Christ and the exquisite virtue of Mary in two conferences on "getting to know" Jesus and Mary. Worldliness, relationships, and the virtue of purity were also addressed in a very practical and helpful manner.

Both Fathers were available to the girls for consultations in which they provided spiritual direction, encouraged the girls to make practical resolutions and helped guide them in this decision.



"Every friendship between God and a soul is the only one of its kind."

– Mother Janet Stuart

(a favourite quote from the seniors' retreat)

Hail to our Alma Mater



Pupils setting up tents for festivities; Sisters, Tertiaries & Faithful before Sung Mass on Sunday 4 August

The Lord must have looked down with delight unto the busy scene of girls rushing about like ants assembling tents, cleaning windows and veranda walls, organising games and more. He blessed their endeavours to celebrate 25 years of their College, St Dominic's, with beautiful weather so that the 300 guests could all enjoy the day of outdoor festivities. The celebrations were ushered in with a Sung Mass in honour of their patron, and that on his actual feast day—August 4th. After Mass, little children ate quickly to queue for a turn on the jumping castle, and older brothers and sisters competed in games, while parents could enjoy time to catch up with old school



Children's tables of food and drinks; A class of past pupils making use of the "Photo Frame"



Past Pupils and Teachers who could stay to the end of the festivities

friends, reminisce at the old school photos on display, jump into an academic tie or school blazer in the photo wall/frame or enjoy sipping on a mocktail in the mild sunshine with friends.

Mother Mary Micaela's speech warmed hearts with memories of the early years, its struggles and joys and the many people who were instrumental in building up the school. The cake cutting, singing of the School Song and Vespers in Church brought the day's activities to a close. We are very grateful to all the past pupils, friends and benefactors who helped us to celebrate this special day in thanksgiving for all the blessings we have received over the past 25 years.



Senior Pupils host games for younger children

**May God
continue to bless
the school, its
teachers, and its
pupils – old and
new!**



Vespers & Benediction to close the Festivities



Merry game of netball—Past Pupils vs Current Pupils

Photo Chronicle—*Winter*

Life in St Dominic's Convent and the Girls' College

{Counter-Clockwise,
starting at top left}

The new gates were completed at the beginning of July for our Convent drives and the new guest quarters—quarters which have already been in use several times over the past couple of months—

Deo Gratias for their completion; Father Albert OP received new novices and professions of our Dominican Tertiaries on July 7

while he visited here for a few weeks—again, *Deo Gratias et Mariae*; Father Albert also preached two recollection days: a Marian one for the Mendicant Third Orders and one on *Deepening One's Prayer Life* for the Past Pupils and Ladies;

The feast of St Mary Magdalene saw the interhouse netball competition become even more exciting, as there were now 4 teams instead of 3, so two games had to be played at the same time during the competition; The seniors enjoyed sessions at the local sports centre to learn and fine-tune their badminton skills; The girls welcomed his Lordship Bishop Fellay to the school while he visited Wanganui, by singing for him. He repaid the gift with an inspiring impromptu talk on our Lady; the annual school fundraiser went well, as the girls and sisters jogged (or walked—if a religious) to raise much needed funds for the college. Thank you for your donations for this worthy cause!





THE O.P. CORNER

Dominican Old Pupils' Corner

*For all of
our readers, too!*



Advocata Nostra

Past pupils of Saint Dominic's College may fondly remember singing the hymn *Salve Regina* with their fellow pupils and the Sisters on various occasions. When sung at compline, all kneel in supplication at these words: *Eia, ergo, advocata nostra... Turn then, most gracious Advocate, thine eyes of mercy toward us.* Our Lady is truly our "Advocate," the Mediatrix of all graces, to whom we confidently entrust ourselves and our intentions.

Our Lady's title of *Advocate* is also given to one of the oldest known, and miraculous, images of our Lady, said to be painted by St Luke. It is known commonly by the title of *Madonna di San Sisto*, for one of the churches in Rome where it resided. Kirstin Noreen has written well about the history of "The *splendori celesti* of the San Sisto Icon" in a 2022 article. She notes: "According to a homiliary (ca. 1100) and a later history of the icon recorded in a lectionary (ca. 1300), the Marian image was painted

following the death of Christ at the urging of the apostles: Saint Luke developed the representation's basic design, but the portrait was completed thanks to God's intervention."

The icon shows our Lady with outstretched hands, in supplication to the unseen figure of her Son, praying for all of her children—to whom she looks with gentle and compassionate eyes. This image type resembles one in Constantinople which was known as the *Hagiosoritissa*, or *Madonna Advocata*.

Mother Augusta Theodosia Drane OP, in her inimitable way, tells of how this icon came to be linked to the Dominican Order: "This picture was a particular favourite with the Roman people. According to the current tradition it had been brought to Rome, many centuries before, from Constantinople, and was the same that had been

borne processionally by St Gregory in the time of the plague, on that Easter Day when the words of the *Regina Coeli* were first heard, sung in the air by the voices of the angelic choirs. This picture had for several centuries been kept in the church of Santa Maria in Trastevere, then belonging to a community of Benedictine nuns, whence an attempt had been made by Pope Sergius III to transfer it to the palace of the Lateran. He himself is said to have carried it thither...This removal of the venerable picture from Santa Maria was not made without strong protest on the part of the nuns. 'But,' says the ancient legend, 'the following night by a stupendous and incomprehensible prodigy, the picture was by Divine Providence carried back to the spot whence it has been taken the evening before.' The Pope, hearing what had happened, came himself to the convent to inquire into the fact, and satisfying himself by ocular demonstration that the holy image had indeed been restored to its original resting-place, he did not venture again to remove it.

"This wonderful event added much to the fame of the picture and the veneration with which it was regarded, and its possession contributed not a little to increase the power and popularity of the nuns of Santa Maria. Without it they determined never to stir, and there seemed great difficulties in the way of again removing it."

Subsequently {in 1219}, St Dominic was given the task, by Pope Honorius, to collect together under regular discipline a number of religious women, then living in Rome without enclosure—some even in the homes of their rich and powerful families—who had hardly been living the religious life and "claimed exemption from the ordinary rules." The nuns of Santa Maria were included in this class of religious and "Dominic's plan was simply... to collect all the nuns of the different convents that had no regular discipline, as well as the others living out of enclosure, into one community, to whom he proposed giving up his own convent of St. Sixtus..."

After much trouble, the Saint managed to win over the nuns to the proposal, but they made the condition that they must be allowed to take their icon with them to St. Sixtus, and if it should come back of its own accord to Trastevere, as it did in the time of Pope Sergius, then they would be allowed to come back after it. St Dominic consented, and after suffering yet more difficulties and 'the vituperating tongues of friends and relations' of the nuns, on the first Sunday of Lent, the sisters took possession of their new convent, after making profession, as Dominicans, in the hands of St Dominic.

"Dominic waited until nightfall before he ventured to remove the picture so often named; he feared lest some excitement and disturbance might be caused by this being done in broad day, for the

people of the city felt a jealous unwillingness to suffer it to depart. However, at midnight, accompanied by the two Cardinals, Nicholas and Stephen, and many other persons, all barefoot and carrying torches, he conducted it in solemn procession to St. Sixtus, where the nuns awaited its approach with similar marks of respect. It did not return; and its quiet domestication in the new house completed the settlement of the nuns." The icon was installed in the nun's church, above the altar, and was

the object of numerous votive offerings over the centuries by the faithful.

In 1575, the Dominican Sisters transferred with the sacred treasure to the Monastery of Saints Dominic & Sixtus, where in 1641 the sacred Image was crowned by the Vatican Chapter {a crown reserved for miraculous images}. As Noreen elaborated in her study, the Icon's position in the Sisters' church changed several times throughout the centuries, "moving... to the lower choir in 1577, where it was placed in the transverse wall. There, the image was protected by a grille and could be turned to face either the nuns in the lower choir or the faithful in the public church...By at least the early 16th century, the image was located above the



altar in a tabernacle that had doors... The icon's eventual installation on the {new} high altar in 1640, where the image could pivot between the lay congregation in the public church and the private enclosed space of the nuns' choir" was the most striking change in the method of viewing the icon.

A miraculous incident underlines the existence of the 'tabernacle' in which the icon was housed: "The Virgin...intervened on behalf of the nuns of San Sisto... when the community was attacked during the Sack of Rome in 1527. Frightened by the potential invasion of soldiers into their cloistered space, the nuns prayed continuously, primarily before their icon, with the hope that the Virgin would not abandon them and would instead protect them as she had in the past. When San Sisto was penetrated by armed soldiers who threatened to kidnap the women, the nuns fled to their internal church where they gathered... in front of the icon in the choir. As the nuns prayed



High altar, Santi Domenico e Sisto,
Rome

for the intercession of the Virgin, Sister Colonna raised a Crucifix towards the tabernacle that contained the icon and declared: 'Holy Mother, defend your afflicted servants and implore the mercy of your Son, who was placed on the cross for our health, for their assistance.'

"In response, the tabernacle doors opened of their own accord to reveal the icon; the 'indecent barbarians' were so frightened by the miraculous event that they quickly fled, leaving the devoted nuns unharmed."

The feast of the *Madonna di San Sisto* is celebrated on 27th June.

Turn then, most gracious Advocate, thine eyes of mercy toward us. And after this our exile show unto us the blessed fruit of thy womb, Jesus.

References:

The *splendori celesti* of the San Sisto Icon (Rome): Intercession, Embellishment, and Female Agenc; Kirstin Noreen; *Memoirs of the American Academy in Rome*, Vol. 67 (2022), pp. 90-128 (39 pages); <https://www.jstor.org/stable/27215853>
Hound of Heaven: Saint Dominic de Guzman;
Mother Augusta Theodosia Drane; 1891

Photo Nook

...a place for past-pupils to share notable events in your lives...

7 June 2024

Philomena Burgstaller received the habit with the Consoling Sisters of the Sacred Heart and was given the religious name of Sr Maria Dolores del Monte Calvario

Deo Gratias!



As a regular section of the *O.P. Corner*, we invite you to share with us and your fellow alumni, in the *Photo Nook*, notable events in *your lives* that have taken place recently. Please send photos with captions (eg. date, event, etc.) to

o.p.corner@opsisters.org.nz



Please assist us to continue in our Contemplative & Active Apostolates

Please consider helping us out—whether with gifts of cash or regular monthly donations. The stipend we receive is minimal, so we are truly grateful for every little effort and sacrifice that helps us to continue living our traditional Dominican way of life.

Thank you to those who have already pledged regular donations—these gifts, no matter how small, do make a difference!

May Our Lady of the Rosary reward your generosity and kindness to the Spouses of Her Divine Son. The Sisters pray specially for you during our weekly Chapter.

Queen of the Most Holy Rosary, pray for us!

AUSTRALIA

Westpac Account Name: Dominican Sisters of Wanganui
Westpac Account BSB Number: 033-636
Account Number: 334285

NEW ZEALAND

Westpac Account Name: Dominican Sisters of Wanganui
Westpac Account Number: 03-0791-0728558-00

Please note that the banks in NZ no longer accept cheques. Apologies for the inconvenience.

All donations now qualify for a 33% TAX REBATE from the IRD.

Please quote our NZ Charities Services Number: CC37884

UNITED STATES

Account Name: Dominican Sisters of Wanganui
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Cheques can be made out to “The Dominican Sisters of Wanganui” and sent to:
Dominican Sisters, Attn: Loren Vaccarezza, 2240 Paragon Drive, San Jose, CA 95131
All donations to our U.S. account now qualify for a tax deductible receipt!

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Visit our website at <https://www.opsisters.org.nz/fundraising>