

NED6 Associate Convocation

Saturday, April 28, 2007

“Cast Your Nets Off to the Other Side of the Boat”

by Peggy McHale, OP Hope Associate

Note: Morning prayer occurred just before this presentation. The prayer featured readings excerpted from Catherine of Siena’s story, as told during the NED6 Visioning Days presented by the Earth Council in June 2006. Setting the backdrop for this presentation, these three excerpts are referenced in the text below. The full text of Catherine’s Earth Council story is located in the Appendix following this presentation.

Introduction

Good morning, it is an honor to be here this morning. My deep thanks for the invitation to speak with you. It’s always the case that you get so much more out of an opportunity like this than you could ever give back!

Shortly after agreeing to be here, I was fortunate enough to travel with friends in Italy for three weeks. For four days, our group was in Siena. I have brought a few pictures to share with you; I regret that I am not a gifted photographer, but these will give you some flavor of Catherine’s hometown. (*Explain: Ribbon markers in photo albums mark sights of particular interest -- her statue, family home, streets in the neighborhood, and so forth.*) A trip back in time, and beautiful, it just drew me in – as I am sure that any of you who have traveled there would agree.

While I was there, the Earth Council reading we just heard in our morning prayer was with me constantly. I got to see Catherine’s childhood cell beneath the stairway in her home, and I could picture her there and just marvel at how unusual she was. And as I walked the warren-like streets of Siena, time and time again, I could hear that part of the reading “What did I know of these streets?”, which is what she asks when God beckons her out of her cell of solitude into a ministry of caring for the sick and the poor, from the contemplative to the active. And it was a grace for me to appreciate that part of her that was a pilgrim – just like me, just like all of us – at those times in our lives when change is happening and we do not know what to do with that fact. In another part of that same reading from our prayer, Catherine says: “*When I look back over my brief life, it all seems very clear now. However, it was not clear at the time, and I certainly did not plan any of the movements from one life phase to the next. Sometimes I responded to a direct summons, other times I felt a pull, and sometimes I did not know ... and so I just did the best I could.*” Doing the best we can and surrendering to the flow of life – that is all that we can do,

right? And then, loving the ardent desire in our hearts, God takes care of the rest.

Let me begin with a bit of a disclaimer. As you heard from my bio, I am by no means a scholar or an expert on Catherine or the church or the future. I am here to share a bit of my self and some personal reflections, one person's perspective, in the context of Scripture and of Catherine's life, and offer that for your consideration. Like Catherine, I will do the best I can – and count on you and God to take it from there. And my hope is that this will somehow be helpful to our shared future – as believers, as world citizens of a new millennium, and as Dominicans. I don't have a whole lot of answers about religious life of the future, or about associates in particular, but, together, we do have some of those answers; and the earth can teach us all else that we need to know. Creation is actually a profound and gifted teacher, because it is God's first word.

Scripture

We begin with God's much more recent word to us, the New Testament, specifically an excerpted reading from the gospel of John. This is a familiar story of a post-resurrection appearance by Jesus to the disciples, the gospel reading for this past Sunday. *Later, at the sea of Tiberias, Jesus showed himself to the disciples once again. This is how the appearance took place. Simon Peter said to those assembled, "I am going out to fish." "We will join you," they replied, and went off to get into their boat. All through the night they caught nothing. Just after daybreak Jesus was standing on the shore, though none of the disciples knew it was He. He said to them, "Children, have you caught anything to eat?" "Not a thing," they answered. "Cast your net off to the other side of the boat," He suggested, "and you will find something." So, they made a cast, but they were not able to haul the net in because there were so many fish. (This is where they figure out that it's Jesus, and Peter jumps up quickly to get dressed and jump into the water. Then the reading picks up.....) Meanwhile the other disciples came in the boat, towing the net full of fish. When they landed, they saw a charcoal fire there with a fish laid on it and some bread. "Bring some of the fish you just caught," Jesus told them. Simon Peter went aboard and hauled ashore the net loaded with sizable fish – 153 of them in all! And though there were so many large fish, the net was not torn. (And then the reading goes on with the conversation between Jesus and Peter, as you recall, where Jesus asks Peter three times "Do you love me?"...)*

Right off the bat, don't you just identify with those weary and sleep-deprived disciples? I do! I think of my own experience when in 1977, as a novice, I joined our first associate committee – and "associate" was a brand new idea. And also at that time, the Ossining Dominicans had just approached Sparkill about this new idea of "affiliation with a community of similar vision." That

was the vocabulary we used then to talk about what we now refer to as “reconfiguration” or “restructuring” or, in some instances, “founding” or “refounding” religious communities by way of some new collaborative structure. Back then, we were trying to figure out how Dominicans could live religious life together, and we were also trying to figure out what an associate was and what kind of relationship there would be between them and vowed members. Sound familiar? Because here we are, in 2007, 30 years later, and what are our questions in a nutshell? How can Dominicans live religious life together, in NED6 or otherwise; what is an associate and what are the qualities of a relationship with the vowed members, and vice versa; and how do we all move forward together? So, after 30 years, or perhaps a little more or less for you individually, here we are – still grappling with many of the same questions! Yes, we have come a long way, absolutely, but still we have so many questions about our shared future.

So, yes, I know what the disciples mean when they say “But we have been doing this all night long, and there are no fish here.” And that’s what they said. Can’t you just imagine that what they were thinking: “Who is this guy, telling us what to do? We’re the fishermen, we do this every day, we know what we’re doing! Who does he think he is?” A funny quality in us human beings: we want someone to tell us the answers, but at the same time, we don’t....

But that morning, here are the disciples, and they are really tired and discouraged. All they had wanted was to catch a few fish; return to what they knew, what was routine and predictable in their lives after all the tumultuous events in Jerusalem and then Jesus’ resurrection. Yes, fishing was a great way to touch back with what was “normal” in their lives, something they understood and could control. But no fish, not a one. And along comes this stranger – because remember they did not recognize Jesus – and he tells them to cast their nets off to the other side of the boat. Ridiculous idea! Fish swimming around on just one side of a boat – and remember that this was a pretty small boat – we’re not talking about the QE II. A boat just big enough to hold 6 or 7 disciples and one net. And fish are constantly moving; they dart around, back and forth, all over the place! If there were fish on one side of the boat, there would be fish on the other side, too.

But Jesus is inviting them to go to the other side of the boat, leave the side they are used to fishing from – the side they know well and are comfortable with – and get a whole new perspective. So, if they were used to facing the shore when fishing, they would be looking out to sea. Or if they were used to facing seaward, they would have to switch so as to be looking at the coastline. In other words, wherever you are, change places. Let go of some sense of control. And when they did that, when they let themselves see things from literally a different point of view, what did they get? A full net – all the fish they could handle, and then some! At one immediate

level, just think of what that must have meant in terms of income for themselves and their families. The very thing they had been working for all night long – food to eat and to sell – they now had more than enough of! Likewise, when we let go of our own perspective, which so often is about our own control, isn't it, God gives us a great gift -- we get to see things from God's perspective, we get to see as God sees. And let's not forget the awesome gift the disciples received that morning – they finally recognized the risen Lord! And when Jesus is present in our lives as He was that morning for the disciples, don't we then recognize that in His presence there is abundance! More than they could wrap their minds around. I suspect that that precise figure of 153 fish isn't part of the story because the disciples were taking inventory and keeping records; I think it was to tell us that was a mighty big load of fish for one small boat and one small net. More than anyone could imagine. That was abundance all right, lavish abundance! And in that apparently precise calculation, could it be that John is inviting us to contemplate infinity, the infinite possibility who is God?

Catherine

When you have that sort of experience – when you are unmistakably visited by the Lord and helped to get through a struggle, to see another perspective that you yourself were incapable of seeing, and then to receive in abundance – every now and then, do you look back on that hard time and wonder to yourself: Now, what was all my fuss about? What took me so long to let go? It is just like a spiral that beckons us to travel the circle, round and round, ever deeper. It is God inviting us to “the other side of the boat,” to leave our individual perspectives, our comfort zones behind. That is, as we heard in our prayer this morning, the life story of our sister Catherine.

How many times was her picture of how things were – and how she thought they should be – how many times did that picture have to change because of her genuine desire for deep and lasting union with her beloved “Godhead”? In the readings during prayer, we actually see three distinct stages in her life's evolution in holiness:

- her years of solitude were a time of individual **contemplation**;
- her growing awareness of the people around her and their needs brought her to a matured sense of **community**; and
- her taking on the failings of the dominant institutional structure of her day, the church, was a **confrontation** of social sin.

Of course, all three overlap and occur simultaneously as well, but the common thread in these three activities -- contemplation, community, and confrontation -- was the surrender of her own ideas, maybe even mindsets, as to how life was going to be.

1. Contemplation

As you know, very early on in Catherine's life she had an overwhelming craving to be alone with God. How she longed to stay there forever "in that comfortable way of knowing God," as the reading says. Just think of how she must have experienced God during that formative time – what she came to know about who God is, her beloved "Gentle Truth," as well as who she was in the face of that Truth. The names she had for God that reflected the depth of their relationship are almost too numerous to count: Peaceful Passion, True Light, Eternal Wisdom, Love Immeasurable, Fire Ever Blazing, Gentlest Love, Eternal Trinity Mad with Love...just to name a few.

But we can be quite sure that it was not always all that comfortable; she had to grow into that. And drawn to God as Truth, true Dominican that she was, there must have been some pretty painful times – times when she learned more about the truth of who she was, how some aspect of herself being was blocking oneness with Christ, and she had to let go of that. She had to surrender.

Let's take just a moment now, and recollect on your one-to-one experience of God. A few questions come to mind. I will give all of these to you later in writing, so for now just listen and see if they move you.

- *What is your name for God? God's name for you? How might those names have changed from your formative years to now?*
- *What has God revealed to you about Himself/Herself?*
- *What has God revealed to you about your own self? At this time in your life, what grace are you requesting – not for other people, but in your own intimate I-thou relationship to know more about God and about your true self?*
- *How might God be inviting you to leave behind a "comfort zone" and see things "from the other side of the boat"?* (Brief silence)

Of course, no name, no words can contain God, who is beyond all language. It is only by being steeped in that awareness, in letting go and falling into the immensity of God, that we can move into the future freely. And God knows, far better than we do, what we need in order to do that. That is why we are invited to "cast our nets off to the other side of the boat" to see ourselves and others in a new light, and to know what in us blocks oneness.

How did Catherine come to this deep knowing? I believe this quotation gives us an important indication of her approach: "...as we discover the earth...we get to the living water, the very core

of the knowledge of God's true and gentle will which desires nothing else but that we be made holy. So let us enter into the depths of that well; for if we dwell there, we will necessarily come to know both ourselves and God's goodness." And now that I have seen Tuscany, the region where Siena is located, and have been touched by its natural beauty, I can see why that part of the world would have been an inspiration for her boundless desire for contemplation. And just as she surrendered to that natural beauty, we are likewise invited to do.

So, I ask you: what is your first-hand experience of the earth? Don't live as I have lived a good part of my life – thinking of the outdoors as the space I walk through to get to or from my car. When I get into a kayak and launch out on quiet waters, however, I meet the earth on her own terms, I see it from some other perspective than my car window, and I meet God – without any words or language because God is beyond all that. Kayaking is, for me, a time of time of profound contemplation. Because a kayak just quietly glides through the water, the birds stay where they are unless you get really, really close, and you get a great view of all sorts of other creatures. Nothing beats being out on the water as the sun rises over the Chesapeake Bay. Now, you can see plainly that I am not all that young anymore and I am certainly not all that “buff” – in fact, exercise is a perennial challenge for me. But rest assured, if I can do it, so can you! And this is more than exercise – it is my soul dipping into those “living waters” of Catherine's. If kayaking is not your thing, try something else that's earth-related, like bird-watching or snorkeling or gardening – something you may have considered and dismissed, or maybe never considered. Or go for a walk; try a trail or park that is new to you.

However you choose to cultivate your relationship with the earth, in the spirit of our Dominican charism of study, learn about what you see and experience. If you take a walk through a forested area, what kind of trees do you see? Are they native or non-native, and why does that matter? If you cross a stream, what does the water look like? What does the stream bank look like? Has part of the stream been piped, and how has that impacted the fish and wildlife that live there? Learn about the earth; you will come to love her and her creator, and yourself, in a whole new way. This is not a process that happens overnight. Take your time with it; the most important part is to just observe and listen. See and learn how the natural order of the earth works. Chances are, it won't be the way you would think is the best or most efficient way to go, but remember it has its own way and you are there, in part, to simply receive what nature has to teach you – you are not there to improve it.

Also, learn about your place on the planet. I grew up in Corning, NY. Since I was a child, I could have told you what county it was located in and how far it was from most big cities. I also could

have told you that it was located on the Chemung River, which flows into the Susquehanna River, but I was clueless where the Susquehanna wound up, except to say maybe “the ocean,” which is pretty vague. I did not know, and it never occurred to me to wonder; that seems to be a norm in our culture. Now I know that all that time I was living in the watershed of the Chesapeake Bay, just as I do now; and so when I am out kayaking on the Bay during those early morning hours, I am connected with the waters of Monkey Run Creek, which flows into the Chemung and is where I played as a child. And because a good part of that Creek was piped to go under roadways, the water on which I kayak is warmer and dirtier than it is meant to be, and all sorts of plants and critters in the water beneath me bear the burden of that.

What watershed do you live in? What do you know about the water quality of the stream or river closest to you, where it comes from and where it goes? How connected are you with your area's natural features – soil, topography, native plants?... (Very brief silence) If you can answer those questions, you get a gold star and then some for being quite counter-cultural!

Have any of you seen or heard of Peters' Projection? (*Show map.*) It is a different way of charting the earth, and it has been somewhat controversial. The globe as we know it is merely one projection of the earth, developed hundreds of years ago by Europeans with elementary tools for measurement who were caught up in nautical exploration of newly discovered continents. Their challenge then, as ours is now, is how to represent an essentially round planet with a flat map. I will read some of the cartographer's explanation of this new approach: *5000 years of human history have brought us to the threshold of a new age...an age of science and technology, and an age of growing interdependence of all nations and peoples. Such a moment in history demands that we look critically at our understanding of the world. This new map, the work of German historian Arno Peters, provides a helpful corrective to the size distortions of (former) maps, and ... Nothing less than our world view is at stake. ...The Peters map sets forth all countries in their true size, ...thus treating all people fairly.*

There is a lot more to say here, and I invite you to check this out during the breaks. Even the small maps around the edge are fascinating – one aviation map has Chicago, IL as the center of the world, another has the south at the top, and there are lots more. Why bring this up here? To remind us all what a significant difference one change of perspective can make, and to give just a glimpse of how much we don't know! That, too, is food for our individual and collective contemplation.

2. Community

We all have that place within us, don't we, some place of uncomfortable new perspective that we would rather not go – perhaps Peters' Projection and its implications is one of those for you! – but “the other side of the boat” is precisely where Jesus beckons us to go. And when we do let go of control and go there, the nets are overflowing! And then, once we have moved, like Catherine, we want to stay there, alone with that abundance who is the risen Lord!

But like Catherine who was called forth out of her precious contemplative cell into the streets to care for the poor and the sick, we are not meant to stay in that comfort zone. We are meant to minister to God's people. And what happened to Catherine when she did that? By ministering to peoples' physical and temporal needs, she encountered the Mystery of the Incarnation – Jesus Himself – in those ordinary experiences of everyday life. This is the holy call to community, and she came to know how extraordinary that really is! And at the same time, her gifts of contemplation, her relationship with her beloved, deepened.

When I lived here at Mariandale, I was fortunate enough to study Scripture at Maryknoll. In a course taught by Rabbi Asher Finkel, I learned that in the Jewish culture there is an understanding that we human beings experience the depth of God in a whole other way – a far more intimate way – when we pray with other believers, when we pray in community. Thus, Jesus needed to be with the disciples in order for his own prayer to have that special dimension of presence and intimacy. That is why, Rabbi Finkel maintained, Jesus sometimes asked his disciples to go apart with him to pray. And that is the cry of Jesus' agony on the cross – having been deserted by the disciples, He was without his praying community. So acutely did He feel God's absence that He cried out, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”

This meditation always leads me to look around at my family, my friends, the people at a meeting or even a convocation of NED6 Dominicans, and marvel at the people whom God has designed as ways to meet Him/Her. And when we look around the room this morning at each other, sisters in Christ, don't you just wonder how God sees us and what God has in mind for all of us? How do we bring each other to the depth and richness of who God is? Here are a few questions along those lines:

- *Who are the people in your life to whom you are closed, who “get on your last nerve,” perhaps hurt you and you have not forgiven? What might your perspective of that person be if you “cast your net off to the other side of the boat”?*
- *As for Dominican Sisters and Associates and where we might evolve, what keeps us from being more fully one? Don't focus on time or distance or other physical factors so much*

as the needs, priorities, outlook or attitude that you have or that you perceive in others. Be aware of any judgments you might be making in this regard. Again, consider what your view might be from “the other side of the boat”?

- *And my favorite question, **what if** we considered ourselves to be living in community with the earth? (Brief silence)*

3. Confrontation

First, a note about the meaning of this word, “confrontation.” It does not usually have a pleasant connotation and is often thought of as something to be avoided. When I use it in this context, though, I am simply talking about facing a problem and doing something about it, or facing a challenge and rising to the opportunity for growth that it presents.

Again, like Catherine – steeped in the Incarnate Jesus – it is oh, so wrenching to leave a time or place of community, that is, the comfort zone of community. We can see how contemplation shapes our perspective of community and ministry, and how a more compassionate sense of community and ministry enables us to give and receive the fruits of contemplation, and how community and ministry inevitably call us back to contemplation. We finally know that this is where God is and where God wants us...so we think. Yet where does Catherine’s beloved Jesus take her next? Away from the comfort of compassion and community into chaos and conflict – to address the dominant corruption of her day, the church and even the pope himself. And we must accompany her. Like Catherine, we are called to confront our culture and our social structures. Catherine was called to save the church; we are called to save the planet. And in so doing, the church, too, will be re-founded.

It is increasingly apparent that our way of life is at cross-purposes with caring for the earth: we drive two-ton machines three blocks down the street to buy milk; we don’t have much time so we eat fast food, and those wrappers wind up in a landfill for centuries; and we think nothing of hopping on a plane for a weekend away. And there are countless other examples of how our privilege has taken from the earth. I don’t say this to judge, or even to ask, at least not here and now, if our lifestyle is good or evil – it is what it is, and it is complicated. For example, it is good that we are all here today at this convocation; this is an important moment in Dominican history, and we have a lot of work to do together. I drove up from Washington, DC, much further than most of you, to get here, and for that choice of mine there are consequences to the earth – our air quality is impaired, and, as you have probably heard, polar bears are having a pretty tough time these days finding enough ice on which to live. How do we weigh and compare those “goods” in

our lives – coming together to live and celebrate our common call, vis-à-vis the inevitable consequences of those choices? How do we make more conscious, conscientious choices? That challenge faces all of us, vowed and associates, and it is much bigger than that. We are all in this together – no matter what race, gender, continent, sexual orientation, or faith expression. Have you heard about the bird in the rainforest whose call has always mimicked the sound of the wind in the trees and the rain falling? Now, its call sounds just like a chain saw – because that is what it is now hearing nearby as the rainforests are clearcut. And don't these cries of the earth, God's holy creation, matter more than all the ways we have of grouping ourselves? We are all one. We are not becoming one because we already are one. God made us that way, and it cannot be undone.

But how do we live together as one? It is so much bigger than lay associates and vowed religious, and if we move ahead with that larger consciousness, in that process a whole lot of things about religious life in the future may just come together and become all that much clearer. For starters, let's just be more conscious of our impact on the earth when we hold a meeting. "Lugging our mugs" and using recycled products are things that I know we already do, and do consciously and faithfully. But...

- ***What if** it were an agenda item in every meeting to check in on the impact of that meeting on the earth? **What if** that were an explicit part of planning for all our future meetings – those held by individual congregations, associates, and NED6?*
- *And **what if** all 70 of us here made that consideration a part of every meeting we participate in at our ministries, our parishes, or any other organizations that we belong to? (Brief silence.)*

Would that simple approach to running a meeting free the earth from the multitude of conditions that oppress it? No, probably not. But confrontation of our social norms and institutions does not have to be on a huge global scale; we don't all have to march and get arrested to make our point and to effect change. And this simple approach would start us, together, thinking in a new way and then, hopefully, acting in a new way to confront and counter-impact the damage that we do without thinking. And it would get others thinking about these same things: *What else needs to be done in your area to restore the earth? Might there be others around you who share the same concerns? What can you do together to say "no" to the depletion of those resources?*

And let me say a little something about meetings, or perhaps it's more about the human condition of all us who attend meetings, any sort of meetings. Or maybe it is just me, but this is my typical experience: I go to a meeting, I see friends, I meet new people, I pick up a thing or two that I hope I will remember, if it's really stimulating I tell a few people about it, and then I

go on with life, and pretty soon that time together has faded away. And I don't know if that is my "comfort zone" exactly, maybe it is more my rut. It has gotten to be pretty comfortable, I must say, that there is no particular expectation about what I carry forward from an experience. Unless we are on the planning committee or have minutes to do, most of us leave an event like today with no particular responsibility for what was shared or learned.

I just mentioned our collective impact on the earth by the transportation we used to get here for this convocation. Today, I have brought along three oak trees. A gardener friend of mine tells me that oaks live on long after those who plant them – more than 400 years, in fact. So, long after each tree is planted, the earth will experience a positive effect from our being together today. What I have in mind is an opportunity for three lucky people, chosen by lot, to move out of their "meeting comfort zones" by taking a tree home to plant – for the sake of the earth and the group gathered here. Does this feel strange to you? Well, good – because that means you are being stretched here, as we all are, just by the idea. Each of these three winners will get to consider and choose where the best place is to plant her tree. Apartment dwellers, do not automatically eliminate yourselves – because your tree could be planted on a relative or friend's property, or in a park, or someplace else that you visit on a regular basis. I say "on a regular basis" because, as you know, dry times come and go, especially in the summer, and your tree will need your care and oversight until it can make it on its own. You do not have to be the person always responsible for it, but you are making a commitment to ensure its proper care and a healthy start in life. And this can be your opportunity to develop a relationship with the earth, as you watch your tree change each season and grow up and out over the years. Whenever you are in the company of your tree, hopefully this Voices of Hope convocation and all of us will come to mind, as will our common responsibility to return to mother earth some of what our lifestyle takes from her. There are a couple of other pieces of this idea that I will share with you this afternoon, when we actually have the drawing. If you have a question, kindly catch me at the break or hold it until this afternoon.

Conclusion

There are so many ways to look at "familiar truths." Today I have invited us to look at ourselves and the earth from God's perspective by leaving our comfort zones and "casting our nets off to the other side." What we have been seeking and hoping for all night long – that is, to know how vowed religious and associates can be more closely united and move together into the religious life of the future – that will be ours, in abundance. Jesus promises us that; the disciples and Catherine witness to that truth.

How to be in relationship – with the earth and with each other – and what structures we may need will all come forth from our contemplative lives, from how we revere the earth and one another in our shared community, and from how we work together to restore our planet and confront the social norms and institutions of our day that would destroy it. And the earth will teach us how. Like Catherine, let us contemplate that and then do the best we can. Let evolutions of understanding teach us of God’s perspective – far beyond ours – and move us to revere each other and the earth all the more. Any confusion or frustration you have about all of this, turn it over to God and ask – really, beg – to have our faith increased and to be willing to see from someone else’s point of view. Seeing our ardent desire, God takes care of the rest.

In some small way, let’s change our lives so that we know the earth, learn from the earth, love it, and work to protect it. Then, the familiar, and the comfort and control of the familiar, won’t matter so much. Together we will have the courage to move out of our comfort zones into new perspectives, to “cast our nets off to the other side of the boat” – knowing full well in faith that the abundance who is Jesus will be there for us. Not knowing all we want to know about our future is an invitation to a conversion, to a softened heart. We will be who we need to be – contemplative believers who revere one another and courageously work together to save the planet, God’s first “yes.” And we will know what we need to know. Our nets will truly overflow. Our sister Catherine says it best in another portion of the same reading from our morning prayer: *Dear sisters, I come to you today with words of encouragement. Go deep into your cell of self-knowledge, but do not ever think that your life or your relationship with our God is all settled. Do not run from the darkness of unknowing, do not spurn the chill of confusion or disillusionment. Rather, step out of your comfort zone and enter the future with a deep trust in God who is always creating something new!*

Thus, Catherine beckons us forward to embrace the challenges of our time in faith; let us run toward meeting that call! Again, my deep thanks for this opportunity to be with you.

Based on my reflections this morning, here are some questions for your individual prayer and response, followed by group conversation this afternoon. You will notice that these questions are divided into the three categories of Contemplation, Community and Confrontation. There is no way you can cover all of them in the time allotted. The questions in the Contemplation section and the beginning of Community are much more personal to you. For this afternoon, I will ask you instead to focus on the active side – that is (*as demonstrated earlier*), the left foot of Action. So, please concentrate for now on the second and third questions under Community and the three

questions in the Confrontation section. *(Instructions here for quiet respect of others' prayerful space, where to go in the building and outside for a contemplative atmosphere and so forth.)*

VOICES OF HOPE 2007: Reflection Questions
“Cast Your Nets Off to the Other Side of the Boat”

Contemplation

- * What is your name for God? God's name for you? How might those names have changed from your formative years to now?
- * What has God revealed to you about Himself/Herself? What has God revealed to you about your own self? At this time in your life, what grace are you requesting – not for other people, but in your own intimate I-thou relationship to know more about God and about your true self?
- * How might God be inviting you personally to leave behind a “comfort zone” and see things “from the other side of the boat”?
- * What watershed do you live in? What do you know about the water quality of the stream or river closest to you, where it comes from and where it goes? How connected are you with your area's natural features – soil, topography, native plants?

Community

- * Who are the people in your life to whom you are closed, who “get on your last nerve,” perhaps hurt you and you have not forgiven? What might your perspective of that person be if you “cast your net off to the other side of the boat”?
- * As for Dominican Sisters and Associates and where we might evolve, what keeps us from being more fully one? Not time or distance or other physical factors so much as the needs, priorities, outlook or attitude that you have or that you perceive in others. Be aware of any judgments you might be making in this regard. What might your view be from “the other side of the boat”?
- * What if we regarded ourselves as living in community with the earth?

Confrontation

- * What if it were an agenda item in every meeting to check in on the impact of that meeting on the earth? What if that were an explicit part of planning for all our future meetings – those held by individual congregations, associates, and NED6?
- * What if all 70 of us here made that consideration a part of every meeting we attend at our

ministries, our parishes, or any other organizations that we are a part of?

* What else needs to be done in your area to restore the earth? Might there be others around you who share the same concerns? “From the other side of the boat,” what can you do together to say *NO* to the depletion of those resources?

APPENDIX

When I look back over my brief life, especially those years with my family in Siena, it all seems very clear. However, it was not clear at the time, and I, Catherine, certainly did not plan any of the movements from one life phase to the next. Sometimes I responded to a direct summons, other times I felt a pull, and sometimes I did not know and so I just did the best I could.

In my youthful intensity, I committed myself to Jesus; as I grew, I longed for a life of contemplation. I craved being alone with God. How thrilled I was when my parents finally granted me my own private living space beneath the stairway. Three years of undisturbed intimacy with God! I just knew – or so I thought -- that this was my call: to stay forever in that place, in that comfortable way of knowing God.

How shocked and sad I was when I realized that God was calling me to leave my cell and go into the streets of Siena. What did I know of these streets? How would I be with my God, my “Gentle Truth,” if I were surrounded by people expecting something of me? Yet I knew that I must obey this call to leave my comfort behind. And when I went out into the streets, I was overwhelmed by the suffering. The cries of the sick and the poor caused my ears to ache. I had never contemplated embracing a leper, my lips touching her wounds. Yet that is exactly what I did, so moved was I with compassion. What surprised me was that as I ministered to the people, my contemplation deepened. In the streets I found my cell of self-knowledge, and I was sure that this was my calling – to be among the needy.

Then came the summons to Florence letter from my Dominican brother Raymond. How wrenching to leave behind my beloved Siena, and I worried about who would continue my ministry with the needy. Would anyone else embrace the lepers? But I knew that this call came from a source greater than Raymond, and I went. In Florence I found the Church in the midst of chaos. Yes, yes, I knew there were problems, but this was overwhelming. Never before had I imagined the Church as a diseased leper! And there I began a whole new ministry of spiritual direction, walking with others searching for a deeper relationship with God. In this journey, too, I was nourished. My contemplative moments deepened, and I realized that we were all seeking God and working and praying for the healing of the Church.

Further and further I went – to Pisa to preach peace and then to Avignon to beg the Pope to return to Rome. Meanwhile, I wrote “My Book.” My health was failing, yet I never felt separated from God. Death was yet another invitation to move beyond what I knew, and so I stepped confidently into the cold north wind.

Dear sisters, I come to you today with words of encouragement. Go deep into your cell of self-knowledge, but do not ever think that your life or your relationship with our God is all settled. Do not run from the darkness of unknowing, do not spurn the chill of disillusionment. Rather, step out of your comfort zone and enter the future with a deep trust in God who is always creating something new.