

Thoma Swanson Receives DIA's 2005 Fra Angelico Award



Amid the smiling faces of her fellow-Dominicans, Thoma Swanson, OP, from Columbus, Ohio, was obviously both surprised and delighted to hear her name announced as this year's recipient of the prestigious *Fra Angelico Award*.

This bronze medallion is presented annually to the member found most representative of the ideals and practices of the Dominican Institute for the Arts, an interna-

among poor women (Mariposa Project) and helped them to organize their own businesses. She continues to import and sell the work of these women.

In Peru she offered classes in painting and woodcut printmaking, and taught clay sculpture to young people involved in a ceramic project in the jungle village of Chazuta. During the violence of the Maoist "Shining Path" insurrection of the early 1990s, the deaths of missionary friends and Peruvians working with the poor inspired Thoma to make a series of woodcuts and paintings. She also fashioned murals, stations, and other art works for churches, and found commissions for the women to make tapestries for churches. The Chapel of the Dominican Studium Alberto Magno in Lima, Peru, is furnished with tapestries designed by Thoma herself and embroidered by the women of Mariposa. She carved the crucifix and designed the stained glass windows for this same chapel.



Thoma has long been active as a speaker at many conferences, retreats, and church services, speaking eloquently on art, spirituality, and related topics. No one can doubt that she is indeed a worthy recipient of the *Fra Angelico Award* from the Dominican Institute for the Arts this year. Neither is there any doubt that her Sisters regard her with admiration and affection. Her community living-group left Thoma almost speechless when they appeared at the ceremony to add their congratulations and applause to that of the others who gathered to celebrate her unselfish life and extraordinary gifts.

tional organization open to all members of the Dominican Order and devoted to truth, integrity, and excellence of artistic expressions.

In her address honoring Thoma, **Jean Ackerman, OP** (Racine), President of the DIA Board, praised her for her education and teaching experience as well as for her missionary and ministerial work in Peru.

Thoma earned degrees in art from Cardinal Stritch University, the University of Notre Dame, and Pratt Institute, focusing primarily on painting and other pictorial techniques, although proficient in many varied fields. In her student days she was particularly drawn to working with stained glass because of its undeniable color and intensity. The small window of Joan of Arc she made as a student inspired her to search for opportunities to continue working in that field. Thoma has subsequently fashioned windows for churches in Cincinnati, New Haven, and Port Richey; and for others in Lima and Chimbote, Peru. Recently, she has made beautiful windows at two sites in Columbus.

As Jean continued her address, she mentioned Thoma's extensive academic experiences, teaching art at Columbus and New Haven high schools; she also began the art department at Albertus Magnus College in New Haven, chairing it for seventeen years. Leaving the college to minister as both missionary and artist in Peru, Thoma initiated handicraft projects



Bread Broken . . . Wine Outpoured

by **Jean Ackerman, OP** (Racine)

President, **DIA** Board

In this, the holy "Year of the Eucharist," artists around the world contemplate the role of table-sharing in relation to their art.



At our July 2005 **DIA** conference in Adrian we all truly experienced bread-breaking in the sharing of each other's arts and artifacts. We accepted new wine being poured into new wineskins in some of the creative newness in paintings, weavings, designs, writings, and photos we were privileged to see.

At every Eucharist we are both strengthened and challenged to become what we have received. This may unsettle us because we who receive a share of the Eucharist are asked to be fractured and broken as Christ was . . . to live for others, as He did. Are we willing to give our lives, to be broken like bread and poured out like wine?

To do art as a response to the sacrifice of Christ is what is asked of us. "Do this in memory of me." "As I have done for you, so you must do for others." John the Evangelist encourages us to look beyond the bread and wine, and remember the command: "Do this" in Christ's memory.

As our tenth anniversary approaches, we are both nourished and challenged by Eucharist. May its energy permeate each of our artistic endeavors. May the challenges for **DIA**—for both the skilled and professional artists -- be addressed with integrity and truth. We ask ourselves, "Who is not at our table of the arts who should be here? What can each of us do to invite these artist to come to this table of artistry as we approach our 10th Anniversary Year? Is not our challenge to become what we have received?"

Overview of July 2005 Gathering

by **Elaine Taylor, OP** (Sinsinawa)

The Dominican Institute for the Arts (**DIA**) held its annual gathering July 16 – 19 in Adrian, Michigan, with renovated facilities there accommodating Dominican priests, sisters, and associates. They gathered at Siena Heights from as far east as London from the English Province and as far west as California from the Western Province.

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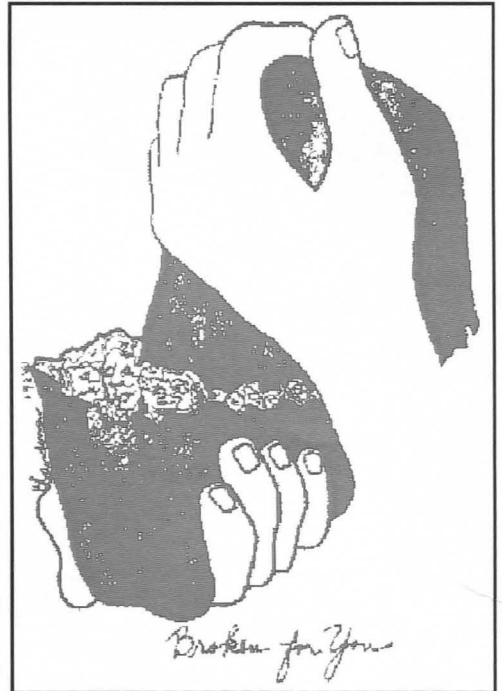
(Gathering, continued)

The purpose of the meeting was to share expertise and innovations, and to communicate with each other.

Workshops offered this year included computer graphics,

oriental brush strokes, abstract structures, calligraphy, watercolor painting, the ringing of bells and chimes, and writing.

Groups discussed topics like praying with more than words, preparing music for publication, holy art and preaching, cinematic contemplation etc. The Gallery



exhibited original pieces painted or sculpted

during the past year; slides, poetry, and musical compositions were shared.

Well-known architects of sacred spaces, **Barbara Chenicek** and **Rita Schiltz**, both Adrian Dominicans, presented the keynote address, "Bright Fire, Spirit Grace" using slides and figurative language to describe the creative process of designing and building a chapel.

Presentation of the *Fra Angelico Award* to the artist deemed most worthy by the membership highlighted the weekend. This year **Thoma Swanson**, a Dominican from Columbus, Ohio, received the award.

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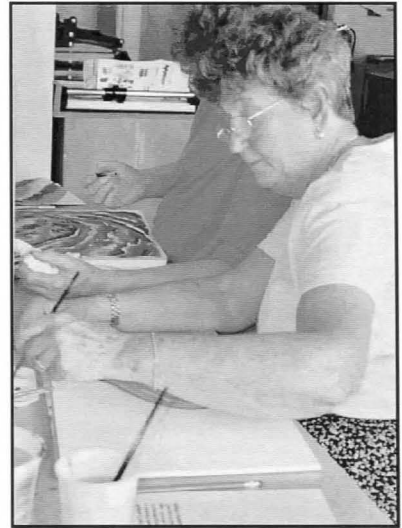
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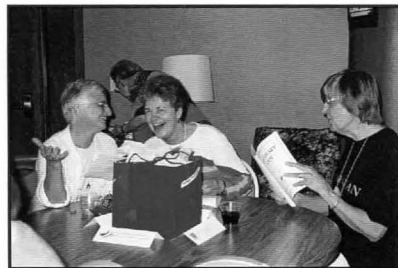
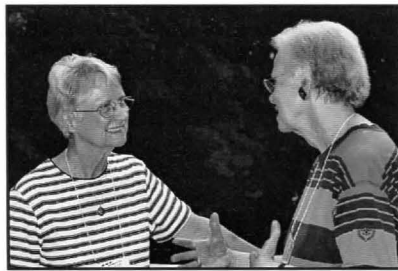
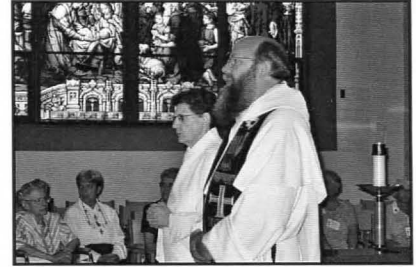
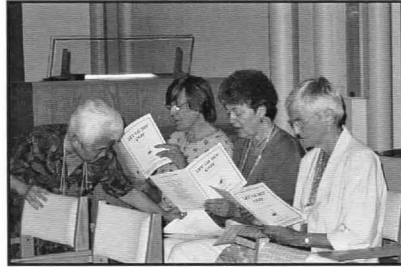
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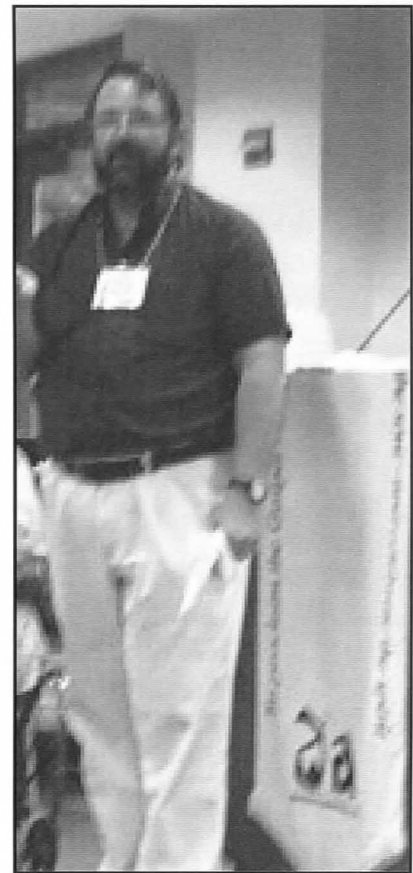
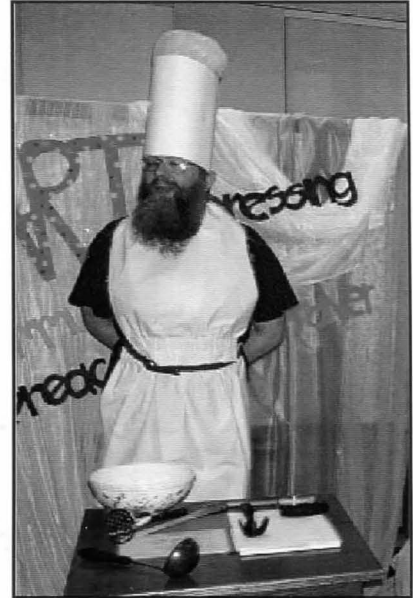
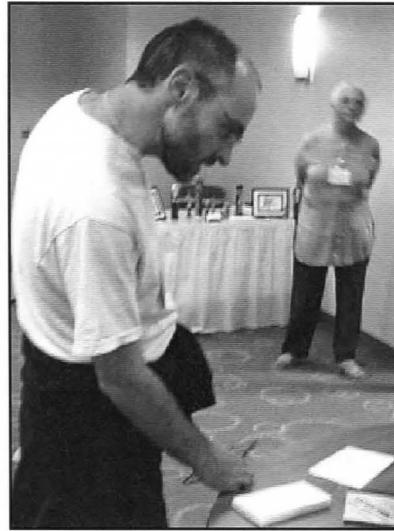
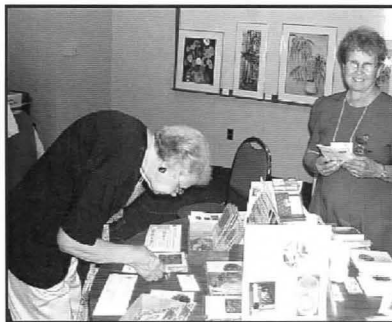
Photos Remind Members of Gathering – July 2005 at Adrian

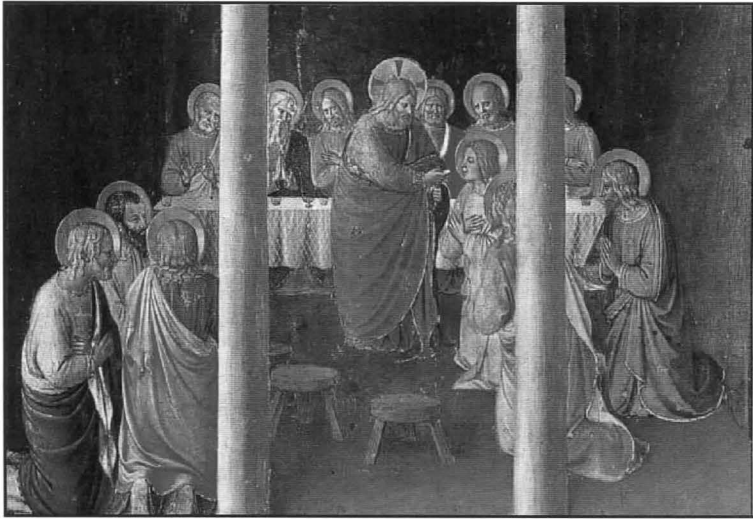


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“O Sacred Banquet in which Christ is received, His Passion is renewed, the mind is filled with grace and a pledge of Future Glory is given to us!”

Many illustrious Dominicans have shared their artistic works with us through the ages; we recognize two of them now: Fra Angelico’s painting, “The Communion of the Apostles,” and Thomas Aquinas’ “O Sacrum Convivium” present us with examples of devotion to and appreciation of the Eucharist. In this issue some **DIA** members offer their contributions to close this year devoted to the **Holy Eucharist**.

Eucharist

Nailed above the earth—
Divinity
 Touched that space
 Between heaven and earth with—
Eternity.

One precious moment above the altar—
Infinity
 Held in human hands;
 Life divine comes to exalt—
Humanity.

– **Joan Ford, OP** (St. Mary of the Springs)

Holy Communion

It lies nestled in my hand,
 This white Host,
 For precious seconds as we measure time.

During that infinitesimal moment,
 Gazing at It, I firmly believe
 The Sacramental Christ,
 Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity,
 Rests on my palm, and

I am Mary, Virgin-Mother,
 Caressing her Newborn;
 A sinner, clutching His robe;
 Martha, preparing a meal;
 Mary, bathing His feet with tears;
 Veronica, wiping His dear face.
 I am myself—weak, needy, yearning
 For union with Him.
 “Come, Beloved, come!”
 And kissing the Host, I receive Him.

– **Mary Fisher, OP** (Racine)

Eucharistic Excerpts From Homilies

“Faith tells us that in Bethlehem, Christ became our brother; at Calvary, He became our ransom; here, on our altar, He becomes our food. Blessed be His beautiful gift, the Eucharist, in which Christ comes to nourish our souls.”

“In the Eucharist, we become What we say we receive: the Body of Christ. We are united to each other in bonds stronger than divisions of culture, or war, or death itself. Nothing—absolutely nothing can separate us from Christ, Whom we love, Whom we have received, Whom we meet in each other.”

“Not in sacramental oils have we been consecrated. But we have been anointed by our Sisters’ trust, through sharing their tears, by reverencing their secrets. In the sacred Body and Blood of Christ we meet, to acknowledge our brokenness, to claim the vulnerability that He assumed in Bethlehem, at Calvary, here in this Sacrament of Love.”

“I receive Christ not to hold Him to myself in rapturous love. I receive Him to take Him to others, to bless others’ lives through His touch, His words, His compassion. It is only in giving Love away that we realize Who He is, that we share in His Paschal Mystery of Resurrection through suffering.”

“In the early days of the Church, the Eucharistic Minister used to say, ‘Receive the Body of Christ,’ with the communicant affirming—as in wedding vows—‘I do’ or ‘I will.’ Now, when I walk up the aisle to receive Holy Communion, I walk as a bride does on her wedding day, and I receive the Host as a bride receives her beloved.”

Sunrise at St. Mary by the Sea, Cape May Point

The sky is suffused with saffron
 Phosphorescence shimmers on the sea
 The sun rises like a giant host
 A consecration takes place at dawn
 Amidst the sounds of ocean waves
 You become present to me, Lord.

– **Barbara Lenniger, OP** (Sparkill)

Keynote Address

Barbara Chenicek, OP
Rita Schiltz, OP

DIA Gathering 2005, Adrian, MI

ART – Bright Fire, Spirit Grace!

We meet tonight—we who share Dominican soul, as searchers/makers, in “*contemplare*,” and in the urgency of “*contemplata*” ...

ART

Thomas Aquinas says it is not our will to make that is art, but the quality of the work that is Art. Ordinary things capable of profound presence—arising both from the Maker and decisions in the Act of Making.

THE MAKER

Consciousness—gained by interaction with the world enables concepts to arise within us, growing in ability to feel, perceive what things are saying. Growing in metaphors of translation.
Skill — growth into oneness with our medium. So one in it that the work that emerges is not “my truth,” but clay truth, space truth.

ACT OF MAKING

Everything is about decisions. Selection must ruthlessly dismiss that which does not add to the strength of what we are making. Elements that underlie decision-making:
Excellence — when the most ordinary thing is extraordinarily done, bringing the piece to unexpected brilliance.
Edge — familiar information put together in an unusual way. Decisions that give an object stirring power. Passing from the realm of a declarative sentence into poetry of a new thought.

Presence — when an object/action becomes a vehicle, a medium of soul, presence has passed into it. All this time, I have been looking at it. Now it is looking at me.

COMMUNITY

In this often lone process, community can be a vital contributive agent to our work. We can become a community-of-makers. Without hierarchy, personal ambition, seeking out the kindly critical eye, educated judgment. Truthfully mentoring, not depriving each other of our best insights. As Dominicans, our goal is not personal success but to be transparent truth-filled receptors of the Spirit, privileged partners in each other’s journey.

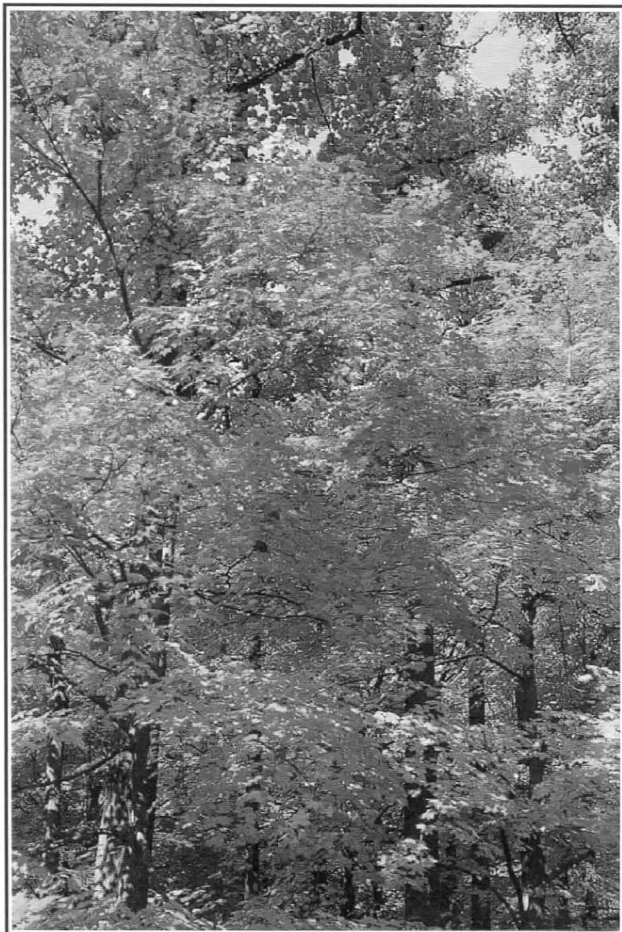
PREACHING

What do we do—what is it toward? What is its substantive gift? To evoke a moment of recognition. A reminder, positioning ourselves and the viewer into a realm higher than the artwork itself—a nostalgia in the ground of one’s being rousing the desire for our own “far-off country,” the home for which we long and have never seen.

Nietzsche said, “*We have art so we shall not die of reality.*”

What do we give as “*contemplata*” for our world, our times? Art—be in us—

Bright Fire, Spirit Grace!



“The world is charged with the grandeur of God;
It will flame out, like shining from shook foil;
It gathers to a greatness like the ooze of oil
Crushed. Why do men then now not reck His rod?
Generations have trod, have trod, have trod;
And all is seared with trade; bleared, smeared with toil;
And wears man’s smudge and shares man’s smell: the soil
Is bare now, nor can foot feel, being shod.
And for all this, nature is never spent;
There lives the dearest freshness deep down things;
And though the last lights off the black West went
Oh, morning, at the brown brink eastward, springs—
Because the Holy Ghost over the bent
World broods with warm breast and with ah! bright wings.”

“Margaret, are you grieving
Over golden grove unleaving? . . .
It is the blight man was born for;
It is Margaret you mourn for.”

– Both by Gerard Manley Hopkins, S. J.

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