The Dominican Charism
in American Higher Education:
A Companion for Students

A Vision in Service of Truth

Sponsored by
Dominican Higher Education Council
2026 Edition



This document was commissioned by the presidents of the Dominican colleges and universities in the U.S. in conjunction with the 2012 Dominican Higher Education Colloquium entitled The Contemplative Vision: Love, Truth and Reality. It is intended to be "a conversation starter" within and among the institutions of Dominican higher education in the United States to stimulate research and writing that will further explore and articulate the richness of the Dominican tradition. All are invited to bring their scholarship, convictions and experiences to the conversation.

Thanks to the initiative of then-president, Dr. Donna M. Carroll, Dominican University assumed responsibility for the publication of the 2012 document. In 2024, the presidents of the Dominican Higher Education Council (DHEC) recognized the need for a review of the document and authorized an updated version be ready for dissemination at the 2026 Dominican Higher Education Colloquium.

Introduction

In 1206, **St. Dominic de Guzmán** gathered a community of vowed religious women and men, as well as devoted lay persons who valued preaching and teaching the truth of the Gospel for the church of their age. Today, in our colleges and universities, the collaboration of lay people with Dominican sisters and friars in commitment to the Dominican mission embodies the fullness of the Dominican family that Dominic had envisioned at the beginning of the order. In 1216, the Order of Preachers (O.P.) was approved by Pope Honorius III.

Our Dominican Heritage and Charism

Christians believe that the Holy Spirit continues to grace the church in every age through gifts entrusted to individuals and groups. For the Order of Preachers, also known as the Dominicans, the unique gift—or **charism**—of the Dominican family is a passion for truth. This passion is pursued through community, study, prayer, and service.

For St. Dominic, **compassion** was key. In a quote attributed to Friar Vincent Oshida we read, "Your heart must be tender to feel another's suffering. If you can do this, you are truly human."

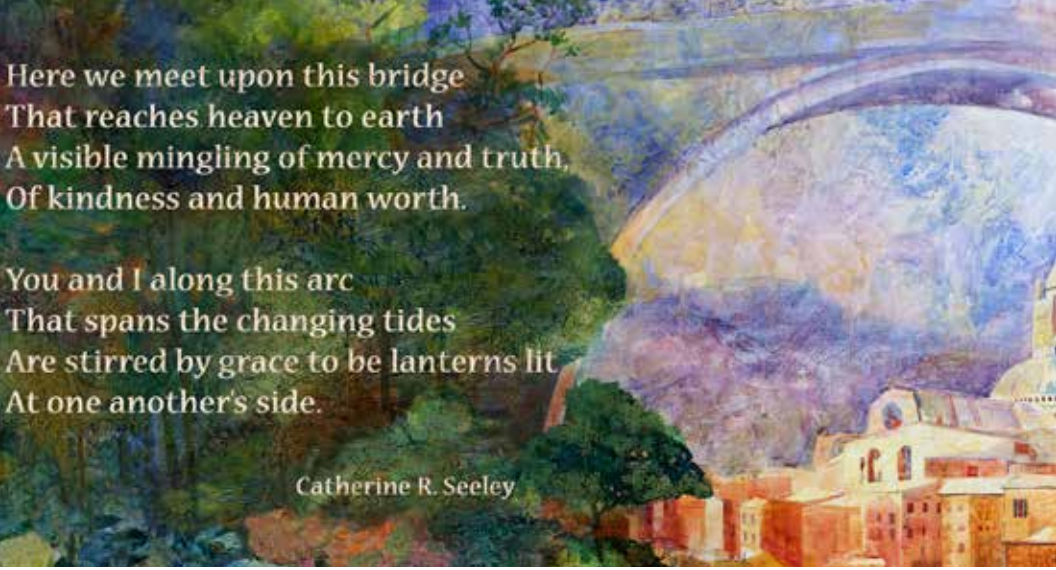
St. Dominic's **search for truth** was grounded in a theology that included the goodness of the natural world. St. Dominic believed we are all God-bearers called to discern God in all things. Eight centuries later, Dominican education continues to embrace these beliefs of Dominic:

- zeal for truth
- compassion for others
- conviction that God has created all to live in right-relationship
- belief in the inherent dignity of every person who is created in the image of God



"The hallmark of the community of truth is in its claim that reality is a web of communal relationship, and we can know reality only by being in community with it."

-Parker Palmer



The Beginnings of Dominican Higher Education in the United States

In the late 1800s, Dominican men established houses of study and Dominican women began to establish liberal arts colleges and universities for young Catholic women. Additional colleges and universities continued to be established in the early 1900s, and these expanded in the mid-1900s to be co-educational colleges and universities.

A Dominican Vision for Higher Education

The pursuit of truth, integration of study and prayer, discerning God in all things, compassion and justice, and engaged scholarship are the values that guide and inspire each Dominican college and university by the use of the **Four Pillars of Dominican life: Study, Service, Community, and Prayer.**

Pursuit of Truth

"Veritas", the Latin word for **Truth**, is the motto and defining quality of the Dominicans. ***"Disputatio"***, is a method that seeks to resolve difficult questions and controversy by recognizing truth in each perspective. This method was perfected by the great Dominican scholar St. Thomas Aquinas and is still used today as a means to deepen our understanding of truth.



Study and Contemplation

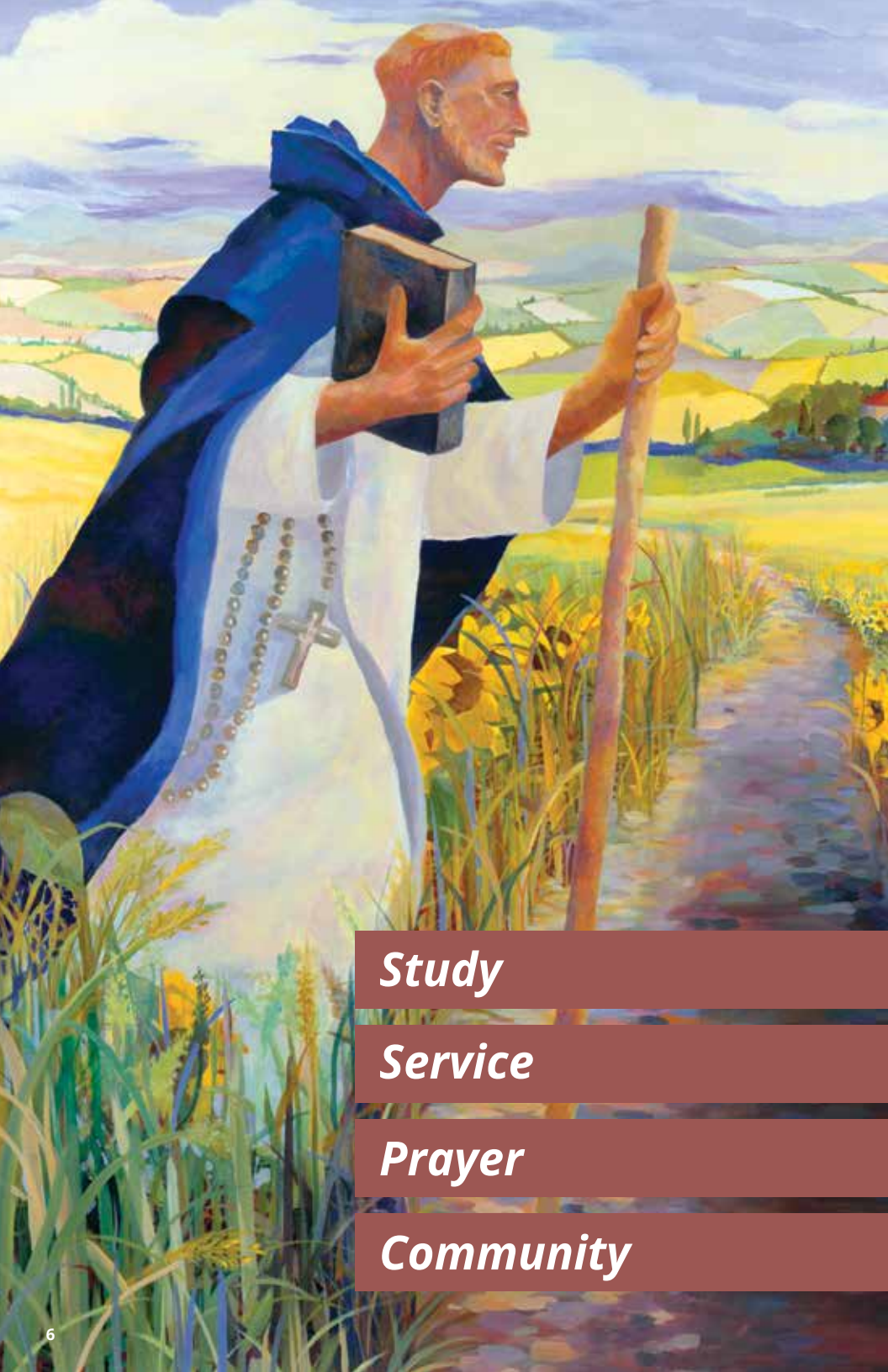
Study and contemplation engage all of reality in the **pursuit of truth and goodness for the sake of others.**

Seeing God in All Things

Creation and our study of it, demonstrates the interconnectedness of all reality. Good in itself, nature **mediates God's grace and participates in it.** Creation is sacred. In his 2015 encyclical, *Laudato Si'* (Praise Be to You): On Care for our Common Home, Pope Francis calls each of us to acknowledge the connection between humanity, all of creation, and the impact of environmental degradation on those globally who are already living in poverty.

Compassion and Justice

Dominican institutions of higher education continue to address the **thirst for truth and cries for justice** of their age. They are called to be communities of compassion and justice in the service of truth. This call requires that we are attentive to the **"signs of the times."** Throughout history, Dominicans have followed the call of Jesus to care for those on the margins. This call is lived out through both direct service and advocacy for justice.


Study
Service
Prayer
Community

Four Pillars: Study

The Dominicans have a motto, *"contemplare et contemplata aliis tradere,"* which means, **to contemplate and share with others the fruit of that contemplation.** Study involves reflection on all reality—the self, God, nature, the cosmos, the world, and people near and far. Study includes subjects from math to art, music to literature, and topics that are just being developed. It includes understanding integrative technologies, such as AI, and both the benefit and dangers it poses. Historically, theology and philosophy have been integrated throughout Catholic institutions of higher education. Our study is not just for ourselves, but to make the world better.

Four Pillars: Service

The pursuit of truth is connected to the work of justice. **Informed by Catholic social teaching, Dominicans form arguments about moral issues** of the day and participate as global citizens in civic engagement.

Service-learning, internships, clinicals, and volunteerism are all ways students at Dominican colleges can learn more about the world and engage in service and social justice actions.

Dominican universities hope to provide opportunities for students to understand how they can use their gifts through service by engaging in community, studying academics, learning about themselves, and personal discernment. The gifts you have are here to share!

The search -- For self, for wisdom, for love, for truth, for justice, for God, is strenuous and unending. We need good companions in order to persevere in it. In good company, in a community of conviction, the quest Never loses its relevance, its urgency, or its savor.

- Kaye Ashe, O.P.

"Truth is holiness of the mind as goodness is the holiness of the heart."

- Paul Murray, O.P.



Four Pillars: Prayer

In the Dominican tradition, prayer is a dialogical encounter or conversation with the God who loves us. It is the starting point and the sustaining force of our mission to preach the gospel.

St. Dominic was a preacher. Dominicans continue this today, informed by prayer through study of Scripture, theological reflection, campus ministry, and retreats. **Preaching for Dominicans is not limited to personal spirituality**, but addresses economic, political, and social issues of the day. Preaching happens in the classroom through engaging questions, challenging assumptions, framing hypotheses, and critiquing policy in light of Catholic social teaching. Other religious traditions, academic disciplines, and global policies such as articulated through the United Nations, also provide guides for seeking truth in the classroom. This pillar is also interpreted as "reflection" or "spirituality" at some institutions.

Four Pillars: Community

The **inherent dignity of each individual**, stemming from Catholic teaching, is at the center of Dominican life. Diversity is celebrated, as we together seek truth from different points of view and understandings of the world. Inclusion, mutual respect, empathy, hospitality, and caring for people from diverse backgrounds and those on the margins of society is at the heart of Dominican community life. This flows into a concern for the common good, compassion, and care for creation, which sustains life.

Summary

For Dominicans, the pursuit of truth, wherever it is found, is a life-long search with good companions. The four pillars of prayer, study, community and service provide a framework for seeking truth.

"What the world needs is openness to light, if I may put it like that. For me, that light is love, and points to the immortality of the soul. As an artist, my job is to make the inner light visible."

Kim En Joong, OP

Catholic Social Teaching

Modern Catholic Social Teaching is a set of documents that developed beginning in the late 19th Century. They are based on Scripture and Catholic teaching. Each was written to address a specific current issue of the time. There are seven basic principles that summarize Catholic Social Teaching.

1. **Life and Dignity of the Human Person:** All life is sacred and all deserve dignity, regardless of background.
2. **Solidarity:** We are one human family and are responsible to care for each other globally.
3. **Care of Creation:** The earth is our common home, and we are called to care for it.
4. **Family, Community, and Participation:** We are social beings and have the right and duty to participate in society.
5. **Option for the Poor and Vulnerable:** How we treat the most vulnerable members of society and how the poorest members are living is a moral issue.
6. **Rights and Responsibilities:** Each person has basic human rights and society includes rights, duties, and responsibilities relating to how we engage each other.
7. **Dignity and Rights of Workers:** Individuals have the right to productive work in safe environments and for fair wages.

"Instead of saying one was right and the other wrong, the task was to reconcile the truth that was in each of them... the holistic, reconciling way of doing theology came to characterize the best of the Dominican theological tradition."

-Liam Walsh, OP





Dominican Saints and Scholars

This dedication to the pursuit of truth for the sake of others has inspired and formed saints and scholars whose works have built up the faith of the church and contributed to the intellectual and spiritual traditions of the order:

- **Saint Albert the Great (1200-1280):** A scientist and lover of the universe, who inspires our care of the earth.
- **Fra Angelico (1395-1455):** A gifted friar, who preached not with words but with paint and color, and who challenges us to see God through the beauty of the arts.
- **Saint Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274):** Dominican friar, masterful theologian and philosopher whose scholarship inspired the *Summa Theologica* and proof for the existence of God.
- **Bartolome' de las Casas (1484-1566):** Spanish priest and Dominican who preached against the unjust treatment of indigenous peoples in the Americas.
- **Saint Catherine of Siena (1347-1380):** Mystic, and sister to the vulnerable, whose passion for the integrity of the Church inspires all to speak truth to power.
- **Saint Dominic (1170-1221):** Our founder from whom we inherit our zeal for the Word and find inspiration in his special gifts of governance and administration, and an immeasurable legacy of wisdom

- **Meister Eckhart (1260-1328):** A German master of prayer and contemplation, who gifts us with audacity to be open to all sources of truth.

- **Francisco de Vitoria (1483-1546):** A brilliant lawyer-friar, who, along with his friar-brothers at the University of Salamanca, developed international law that would reform the Spanish colonies of the Americas.

- **Saint Jacobo Kyushei Gorobioye Tomonaga de Santa Maria (1582-1633):** Japanese Dominican priest who was martyred for his preaching.

- **Saint Marina of Omura (birthdate unknown, died 1634):** a Japanese laywoman and Dominican tertiary who sheltered Christians during persecutions and was martyred.

- **Saint Martin de Porres (1579-1639):** The son of a Spanish nobleman and a freed black slave, Martin faced great prejudice but lived a heroic life dedicated to charity for the poor and marginalized. He is known as the patron saint of social justice.

- **Saint Pier Giorgio Frassati (1901-1925):** a Dominican tertiary who loved mountain climbing, engaged his young adult peers in the faith, and was dedicated to social justice and serving the poor.

- **Saint Rose of Lima (1586-1617):** The first canonized saint of the Americas, Rose was known for her life of prayer, penance, and contemplation.



Dominican Mottos, Symbols, and Catch Phrases

"Contemplare et Contemplata aliis Tradere" – "To contemplate and share with others the fruit of that contemplation," a quote from St. Thomas Aquinas, exemplifies that Dominican study is not just for one's self, but for the good of the world.

Disputatio - debate or argument; promoting consensus rather than conflict.

"The intent is not to erase all distinctions and come to uniformity, but to respect differences, and to engage them honestly and lovingly, recognizing that Truth abides in many unexpected places."

-Sister Barbara Reid, O.P.

"Laudare, Benedicere, Praedicare" – "To Praise, To Bless, To Preach" is another central motto for Dominicans.

Veritas – "truth," is the central motto for the Dominicans.



Dominican Cross - The Dominican Cross is the main feature of the heraldic arms (shield) of the Order of Preachers, established in southern France in the 13th Century. The French connection is seen in the *fleur de lis* on the end of each cross limb. Black and white is used to demonstrate joy and humility in the search for the truth of Christ's gospels.



Dominican Shield - The basic Dominican shield is black and white, with white piercing the darkness.



Dominican Star - A star is most often depicted above images of St. Dominic. The traditional Dominican Star has eight points. The star represents compass points and it was said that during St. Dominic's baptism, his godmother saw a star shining above his head.



Dog with Torch - Before Dominic was born, his mother had a dream of a dog, lighting up the world with truth. The dog also represents the Latin for Dominicans, "Domini-canus", which sounds like "Domini canes," translated hounds of Lord.



Glossary

Charism: a transforming grace given by the Holy Spirit to an individual or a group.

Common Good: conditions that facilitate each person or group to fully live out their potential.

Contemplation: being fully present, deeply thinking about a topic, often in connection to an awareness of God's presence.

Dominican Nuns: women who have taken vows in the Catholic Church, whose main work is prayer. Nuns are cloistered, meaning they do not typically engage with others in the world.

Dominican Friars: male Dominicans who have taken the vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience and may be brothers or ordained priests.

Dominican Sisters: women who have taken vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience in the Catholic Church, whose main work is in the world.

Lay: within the Catholic tradition, any person who is not ordained or vowed.

Order: a community of men or women in the Catholic Church bound by vows that follow a specific spiritual rule, such as the Rule of St. Augustine.

Right-Relationship: rooted in Scripture, right-relationship refers to the formation and maintenance of respect and peace between an individual and God, the people and creation around them.

Saint: an officially recognized hero or heroine in the Catholic Church.

Synodality: the process of meeting that involves active listening, inclusive participating, and spiritual discernment in making decisions.



Reflection Questions

1. What does it mean to be Dominican educated? How is that different or similar from your prior educational experiences?
2. How does a Dominican education prepare me for more than just a good job?
3. Who are the heroes and heroines or leaders in your life? What characteristics do you admire about them?
4. What Dominican Saint speaks to you and why?
5. Which pillar appeals to you most?
6. Where have you seen the Dominican symbols, mottos, or saints on campus?
7. How does the Dominican tradition challenge you to take risks?

Dominican Colleges and Universities in the United States

Albertus Magnus College - New Haven, Connecticut
Dominican Sisters of Peace

Aquinas College - Grand Rapids, Michigan
Dominican Sisters of Grand Rapids

Barry University - Miami, Florida
Dominican Sisters of Adrian

Caldwell University - Caldwell, New Jersey
Dominican Sisters of Caldwell

Dominican University - River Forest, Illinois
Dominican Sisters of Sinsinawa

Dominican University New York - Orangeburg, New York
Dominicans Sisters of Blauvelt

Edgewood University - Madison, Wisconsin
Dominican Sisters of Sinsinawa

Molloy University - Rockville Centre, New York
Dominican Sisters of Amityville

Mount Saint Mary College - Newburgh, New York
Dominican Sisters of Hope

Ohio Dominican University - Columbus, Ohio
Dominican Sisters of Peace

Providence College - Providence, Rhode Island
Dominican Friars of the Province of St. Joseph

St. Thomas Aquinas College - Orangeburg, New York
Dominican Sisters of Sparkill



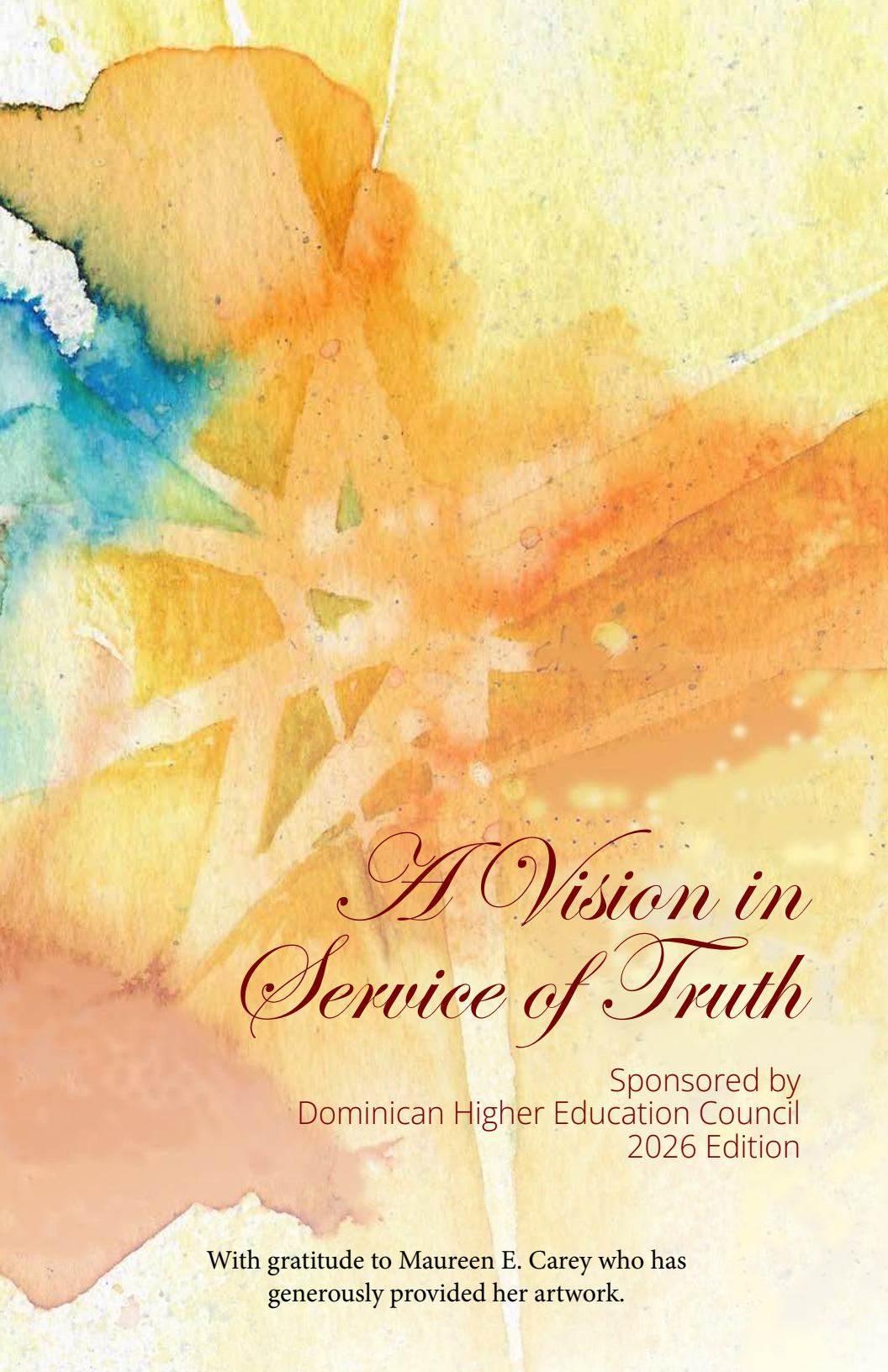










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