A few weeks ago, at the opening dinner of the academic year, given for the faculty and staff by President Donna Carroll, I had the pleasure of being seated next to Bill Jenkins. For those of you who haven’t had the grace of meeting Bill yet, he’s a teacher in the theatre arts department and the technical director of the performing arts center. Actually, he pretty well runs the place we are seated in right now. Bill and I were chatting about Dominican and about our experience working here. Bill’s been here a fairly long while, and I’m still a relative newcomer. Though I guess by college standards, as I start my fourth year, I might be considered a senior now.

Anyway, as we talked Bill began to speak about the Dominican sisters, and their support of the arts. He recounted to me his appreciation for the way they attend every student production, and so many of the concerts and performances that DUPAC puts on for the surrounding community. He spoke of the way the sisters encourage him personally, with kindness and care. And then, Bill made an extremely insightful observation about the culture the sisters have created here at Dominican. He spoke about the quality of our shared life at this university—contrasting it a bit with other institutions in which he’s worked. He said, “there is something special about a group of people who choose to make the whole world their family.”

“There is something special about a group of people who choose to make the whole world their family.” Yes, I thought, yes, there certainly is.

I hope you have had a similar experience in your time at Dominican—the feeling of being included as family…whether it be a kindly question from Sr. Melissa, perhaps, about the health of your father, a question that touched you deeply and that may have even left you wondering how she knew your Dad was sick in the first place. Or perhaps it was in the slightly embarrassing moment at the university assembly when Donna Carroll called you out from the back of the hall and invited you by name to take an open seat in the front. Or maybe like senior Cynthia Velasquez, you have created something remarkable with the group of students who share your major so that your studies have become, in Cynthia’s words, “not really like a class anymore at all, but more like a family.”

We often claim, proudly, that at Dominican University we are a relationship-centered community. And this element of our character has sprung naturally from the Dominican Order upon which we are founded, for which we are named, and under whose sponsorship we continue. As the Dominican theologian Fr. Don Goergen has written, “The spirit of St. Dominic was a relational spirit, a spirit of friendship, of brotherhood, and sisterhood.” “Perhaps that is why it is not so strange today to speak of a Dominican
Family as often as we do of a Dominican Order. The word ‘family’ gives emphasis to the spirit of kinship or relationship.”

Our documents note that the university was founded in 1901, but we should recall that our heritage is much older than that—it stretches back to St. Dominic’s assembly of a new community at Toulouse in the thirteenth century, through Catherine of Siena’s powerful insistence on our interdependence in the fourteenth, Bartolomé de las Casas’ defense of the native peoples in the sixteenth, and Fr. Samuel’s ministry among the immigrant miners in the nineteenth.

And truly, it goes back to the life and preaching of Jesus who said, “just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.” And before Jesus to the prophets like Isaiah calling out to the people: “bring the homeless poor into your house, let the oppressed go free.” And before the prophets to the very dawn of creation, to the gratuitous love of God bringing out of nothing this amazing world of which the human family is but one marvelous part.

This history—together with the stories of creation, the heroes and the heroines of the past, the cultures, religions and traditions that each of us individually brings to this place—this history and experience of kinship—sets the stage for our conversation today.

As we move, in this second symposium, from motto to mission, from *caritas et veritas* to “participation in the creation of a more just and humane world,” we consider an understanding of justice quite different from the one invoked in much of the public discourse that surrounds us. Beginning with the experience of family that we have shared and the understanding of kinship that we have inherited, allows us to see more easily and more clearly why and how our conversation about “*caritas et veritas*” can move with such fluidity into a conversation about justice in the world. Because justice, within this framework of interpretation, loses the merely contractual connotations so often implicit in our civic language, and it most certainly shakes off the baggage of revenge with which “justice” is often merged in nationalistic language. In a Dominican context, the foundational experience of family opens our eyes to see justice as the expression of kinship.

Greg Boyle a Jesuit priest, the founder of Homeboy Industries, a tremendous work of justice and solidarity with gang members in east LA, wrote in his memoir, *Tattoos on the Heart*:

“Mother Teresa diagnosed the world’s ills in this way: we’ve ‘forgotten that we belong to each other.’ Kinship is what happens to us when we refuse to let that happen. With kinship as the goal, other essential things fall into place, without it: no justice, no peace. I suspect that were kinship our goal, we would no longer be promoting justice—we would be celebrating it. Jesus was not a ‘man for others;’ he was one with them. There is a world of difference in that.”
Justice is the path we pursue when the truth we have found is that we are brothers and sisters to one another, that we are family, not just to those who dwell under the same roof as we do, but to those who dwell in the same city—whether east or west of Austin Avenue; to those who dwell on the same land we do—whether north or south of the border; to those who dwell on the same Earth—whether across the hall or across the ocean.

Justice, as understood in the tradition of Catholic social thought, “is the primary way of caritas, the minimum measure of it, an integral part of love in deed and in truth.” Justice is caritas—not coddling as Arvid and Vish reminded as last year—but love concerned “with the real needs of our neighbors.” To quote the great Peruvian Dominican, father of liberation theology and champion of the poor, Gustavo Gutierrez, justice is the concrete expression of that kind of love “that makes no attempt to gloss over the social oppositions that obtain in the concrete history of people, but strides straight through the middle of them.” Justice is how we love when the one we love is trapped in a failing school or an oppressive stereotype; has lost his job or is trying to shield his children from desperate hunger; is abused by her spouse or the target of military violence. “Justice,” as Gutierrez wrote, “is love in context.”

This kind of love is no easy thing. The social oppositions that plague the human family are complex, deeply rooted, not easily jettisoned in favor of fresh beginnings or social unity. Indeed, often they are not even easily recognized. The history of peoples is not only full of grace, but full also of ugliness, pain, suffering and oppression. It is a complicated web of motivations, machinations, circumstances and choices, not easily unraveled or untangled, and impossible to undo.

And so, in order be a people of just love—a people responsive to the real circumstances in which we find ourselves, we need all of the disciplines. We need rigorous study, and an uncompromising pursuit of truth. We need economics and philosophy; psychology and literature; sociology and chemistry. We need each discipline and every scholar—including student scholars—at the university working diligently in his or her field to teach us how we might love, really love, in context. We need study, lest we be blinded by self-righteous ideology or handicapped by good but bumbling intentions.

And we need the spiritual disciplines as well. We need time for contemplation, meditation, self-examination, prayer—time for the inner pursuit of truth, time to cultivate within our hearts the desire to love, and the courage to live justly. We need to practice the spiritual, as well as the academic disciplines, lest our virtues fall victim to our self-deceptions, or our hopes be obstructed by a smallness of heart. Remember Jesus’ friend who answered his call to “love your neighbor as yourself” by mustering up a question teeming with self-serving obfuscation: “but who is my neighbor?” Or recall the nations who came to the seat of glory, shocked at their fate asking, “Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison and did not take care of you?” We need spiritual discipline to see, to see our neighbors—and ourselves—truly. And we need the spiritual disciplines in order to strengthen within us the courage to
commit to the justice love requires. For it does require courage. Courage and community.

This is why at a university that claims “Caritas et Veritas” as its charge, we celebrate students like Arianna Salgado just joining us as a freshman this year who played an instrumental role in the passage of the Illinois DREAM Act; and David Ramirez who graduated in May, commissioned out of Ebenezer Baptist Church for an act of civil disobedience protesting exclusive admittance policies at the University of Georgia; and Portia Anderson who you will hear from later this afternoon at the Academic Convocation. All young people who dream of a world with opportunity for people of all nations, unafraid to lead the fight to create such a world, risking their own comfort, and even their security to make such a future real. This is why we award men like Cherif Bassiouni and women like Krista Hansen who work within their chosen professions—professions as different as law and theatre—to give voice and protection to those suffering at the margins of any society. This is why we invite leaders like Eboo Patel and Tony Cortese to address us, leaders who inspire and gather the energies of thousands into the shared work of building movements of justice, humanity, and kinship. This is why we gather over 1200 strong this day, to listen to our friends and colleagues, 150 of them, speak about their own vision and efforts in the public work of caritas et veritas.

This is why we—each of us—asks of ourselves today, “what do we do? what can we do? what must we do to participate in the creation of a more just and humane world?” We ask with the hope that from the asking, an answer—a calling—might follow. And that encouraged by the witness of one another, and of our ancestors before us, we might have the courage to do that thing from which, as the prophet tells us, “your light shall rise in the darkness…you shall be like the watered garden…you shall be called repairers of the breach.” That we might do those works of justice that flow naturally from the recognition that “we belong to each other.” That future generations might say of us, “There is something special about a university that chose to make the whole world its family.”