

Lay Cistercians of Gethsemani Abbey

# FORMATION GUIDE

Revised 2011

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*“There have always been lay people in a more or less close relationship with a monastic community, finding in it an inspiration and a support for their Christian life, and sometimes a group of friends of a particular community. During the last quarter century something new has developed. Lay people have felt called to integrate into their lay vocations – family and professional life, as well as their social and religious commitments – the most fundamental values of the Cistercian life.*

*These people are known by different names (oblates, associates, etc.); but in general they are called ‘Lay Cistercians,’ and form a group of laity attached to a community of Cistercian nuns or monks...*

*These communities of Lay Cistercians have created bonds among themselves, and in 2000 began to hold periodic international “encounters.” Following these meetings, they have sent messages to the General Chapters, to which the Order has responded. In the course of the meeting at Huerta in 2008, they drafted a document describing the Lay Cistercian identity, which was communicated to the General Chapters of the same year. The chapters officially recognized the groups as a lay expression of our Cistercian charism.”*

O.C.S.O. Website, “Lay Associates”

## I. Introduction

A common motivation for Christians who are attracted to the Lay Cistercian way of life is their desire to seek God more intentionally through Christian values manifested in the Rule of St. Benedict and the Cistercian tradition. These values are ultimately values of the Gospel, and have great significance in one's daily, ordinary life and circumstance of family, faith community, job, relationships, etc. A person may feel a call to holiness and to a deeper awareness of their weaknesses, thus being open to transformation and ongoing conversion.

Those who inquire about the Lay Cistercian associate program affiliated with the Abbey of Gethsemani and who eventually are accepted for admission into the two year discernment process are in need of effective and nurturing guidance. Therefore, in this revised formation guide, we expand on earlier recommendations for the discernment and initial formation of candidates for membership in the community of Lay Cistercians of Gethsemani Abbey. This revision includes additional recommendations for the continuing formation of LCG members.

The guide addresses the entire process beginning with the screening of applicants, the acceptance of candidates for local LCG membership, and the provision of mentoring and formation resources for candidates and committed members. A candidate needs to be initiated into the life of the local LCG community from the beginning of the discernment period.

In the spirit of unanimity it is expected that local LCG leadership and particularly those involved with formation and mentoring will implement the suggestions addressed in this guide. It is also important that there be uniformity of practice. The formation guide allows for some flexibility and creativity of use, so that unique gifts and experience within local LCG communities can be maximized.

We recognize that the Holy Spirit is active in this process. We seek the guidance of the Holy Spirit and support of members of local LCG communities and the community of Gethsemani Abbey as we grow in understanding of the Cistercian charism and live our lives as Lay Cistercians Through prayer, reflection, mentoring, support, and engagement in the community, the candidate will be equipped to have a positive discernment process as she or he prepares to make a commitment to the Lay Cistercian way of life. The primary tool of engagement in our way of life is the LCG Plan of Life. The elements of the Plan identify the spiritual values and practices that, if embraced wholeheartedly, will provide a formative experience for the candidate.

We look to Cistercian monastic spirituality as also being formative in our lives as Lay Cistercians. We who are attracted to monastic spirituality have found that it provides a better focus for our Christian lives and encourages attentive listening to God in the silence of our hearts.

Our primary consideration with respect to formation in the Lay Cistercian way of life is to fully enter into the spiritual values and practices that we have defined in the Plan of Life. We must let the life that we have embraced form us. Therefore, we encourage candidates for membership from the very beginning of their discernment to enter wholeheartedly into prayer, work, study, silence, solitude, simplicity, and stability. Reflecting both individually and with a spiritual mentor on one's experience of prayer, work, study ... can enhance the candidate's formation. The second consideration is to commit oneself from the very beginning to participate in the life of the local LCG community. The collective gifts, talents, wisdom, experiences, challenges and weaknesses of members that are shared in community will nurture and benefit all in our spiritual quest to build up the church and follow the call of the Holy Spirit to holiness. Cistercian monastic spirituality places much emphasis on communal (cenobitic) life as a major element in growing spiritually.

Since its founding in 1989, the Lay Cistercians of Gethsemani Abbey have been assisted through the efforts of Fr. Michael Casagram, one of our monastic advisors, with the identification of many rich resources to enhance our formation in the Lay Cistercian way of life. Fr. Michael has authored many of these resources, most notably , ***“Toward the Formation of LCG Members”*** (2001) and more recently ***“Ecumenical Considerations for the Lay Associates of Gethsemani”*** (2010). He has also introduced us to the ***Exordium: A Program of Reflection and Study on the Values of the Cistercian Reform*** (Casey, 1998) and to ***Ratio Institutionis: Guidelines on Formation, Called to be transformed into the image of Christ*** (O.C.S.O. General Chapters of 1990). Even though the Exordium and the Ratio Institutionis were written for a Cistercian monastic audience, they are very beneficial for us who are called to define and live a lay expression of the Cistercian charism.

“...A careful implementation by a community of these principles and norms should ensure that its members receive an adequate formation. A frequent recourse to the Rule of St. Benedict, to our constitutions and Statutes and other documents of the Order and to the appropriate documents of the Church will be necessary. But above all, a constant reading of the writings of our Cistercian Fathers will ever remain a privileged source for learning how to become a Cistercian or how to help someone else discern and nurture the Cistercian grace present in his or her heart. Finally all must remain aware of the fact that whatever the means used in the work of formation, it is the ultimately the Holy Spirit alone who can accomplish in us the necessary trans-formation though this is something which will not take place without our co-operation.”

*Ratio Institutionis, Epilogue 1990*

Therefore, let us proceed to identify key elements of the process of discernment and initial formation of candidates for membership in the community of Lay Cistercians of Gethsemani Abbey. This guide will continue to identify key features of ongoing formation for committed members who desire to participate as laypersons in the School of Love in the Cistercian tradition.

## II. Steps for selection for LCG membership

Individuals who are interested in becoming LCG members will go progress through the following steps:

- **Inquirer:**
  - Initial inquiry
  - Submission of application
  - Discernment for candidacy
- **Candidate:**
  - Initial Formation
  - Welcoming by community
  - Mentoring : Two-year candidacy with mentor
  - Evaluation and Discernment for membership
- **Member:**
  - Commitment Service

### a. Inquirer:

#### **Initial inquiry:**

Individuals learn about the Lay Cistercians of Gethsemani Abbey through the LCG website, during visits to the Abbey of Gethsemani, or by contact with LCG members in their local area. A phone conversation or face-to-face meeting with the inquiring individual and a LCG member(s) in a leadership role is the normal first step in the discernment process. Occasionally, follow up conversations may occur so that there is ample time for the aspirant's questions to be addressed, and for sharing of information and what is expected of the person who is accepted as a candidate for LCG membership.

#### **Submission of LCG application:**

If it seems appropriate, the next step is the submission of a LCG Application, if it has not been previously received. The pre-candidacy period is a crucial time of assessing the applicant's suitability for entering the two year period of continuing discernment and initial formation for Lay Cistercian membership. During this period, issues or barriers may surface with the applicant that may indicate challenges or questionable motives for seeking admission to the LCG community. Does the applicant present as one who is truly called to contemplative living and prayer in the Cistercian tradition.

It is further recommended in most instances that the applicant will be encouraged to **attend one or more meetings or events** of the local LCG community. This will allow additional members of the community to have input in the selection of a LCG candidate. It also allows the applicant to interact with community members in order to obtain a practical sense of comfort and authentic calling.

Consultation among leadership of the local community will result in a decision to accept or reject an applicant to enter the two year minimum period of initial formation. It is highly recommended that objective criteria be established to assist local community leaders in making a decision about the suitability of an applicant for entrance as a candidate for the community.

### **Discernment for candidacy:**

The primary question for a candidate for LCG membership is to discern if he or she is invited by the Holy Spirit to live a lay Cistercian life. In other words, is the individual receptive to restructuring his or her life according to Cistercian values and practices that can be lived authentically as a lay person. The candidate will be challenged during the discernment period to determine what commitments are needed to live a Cistercian lay contemplative life. During the discernment period, the individual is expected to make a reasonable effort to begin integrating the spiritual practices of the [LCG Plan of Life](#) into her or his daily/weekly routine. The Plan is the basic guide or rule for Lay Cistercians of Gethsemani Abbey as they embrace a contemplative lifestyle.

We desire our association to be a community of persons who take their personal commitment to live the Plan of Life seriously and to deepen their spiritual life as laypersons according to the Cistercian tradition. Individuals are free to disassociate themselves from LCG at any time during the candidacy period or after making a commitment to LCG membership.

**There are not any canonical or legal obligations of any kind.**

## **b. Candidate:**

### **Initial Formation:**

As the candidate begins the discernment process, an experienced LCG member will be identified as a **mentor for the candidate** to provide guidance, support, and companionship. The mentor is a LCG member who has been a member of the LCG community for at least one year and is experienced with living the Plan of Life. The mentor will follow established guidelines for providing guidance and support for the candidate during the discernment process. The mentoring component is essential for beginners who are discerning their call to embrace the Cistercian charism in their spiritual journey as Lay Cistercians. The mentor provides the orientation and guidance for the candidate as they utilize established formation guidelines.

### **Welcome by community**

It is recommended that the local LCG community welcome the new candidate to the community with a special prayer or ritual invoking the blessing of the Holy Spirit and the support of the local community for the candidate during their initial formation period. The candidate's mentor is included in the prayer in a special way.

## **Mentoring**

The mentor will continue the orientation of the candidate by introducing the candidate to the recommended formation guidelines. The candidate is provided with a copy of the Plan of Life, formation documents, and is encouraged with the input of the mentor to develop an individualized formation plan. It is expected that the candidate's plan of initial formation should provide the opportunity for the candidate to become initiated into the Lay Cistercian way of life that integrates the major elements of the Plan of Life of Prayer, Work, Study, and Conversion of Manners. The entire local community is encouraged to provide additional mentoring or modeling for beginners to our way of life. Candidates are expected to participate fully in the community's meetings and events.

As indicated above, the formation process for a candidate for LCG membership is a **two year process**. A recommended course of study and reflection for candidates who participate in formation is presented under the topic Formation for Candidates (later in this manual.) Individuals who contact us with an interest in our community of Lay Cistercians may have varying experiences with contemplative living and spirituality and an understanding of the Cistercian tradition. While some have developed a disciplined routine of contemplative spiritual practices, others are less experienced and need more structure from a formation program. Still others may have some formation in the contemplative tradition, but require more focus on the Cistercian tradition and with its characteristic values and spiritual practices. The formation curriculum for beginners is flexible and complements the **LCG Mentor Guidelines** revised in 2010.

## **Evaluation and Discernment for membership**

Prior to the completion of the two-year period of discernment and formation, the candidate, mentor, and local LCG community leadership will mutually evaluate the candidate's suitability for membership in the community of Lay Cistercian of Gethsemani Abbey. If accepted for membership, the new LCG member will be expected to affirm his or her commitment to the Lay Cistercian way of life and to the local LCG community either during the annual LCG retreat at Gethsemani or at an event of the local LCG community.

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### **c. Membership:**

#### **Admission to the LCG Community**

The **LCG commitment service** is a celebratory event that will follow a prescribed format of prayers, hymns, and commitment statement that is signed by the candidate. At the conclusion of the commitment service for new members, there is an opportunity for LCG members to renew their commitment to the Lay Cistercian way of life.

### III. LCG Formation Curriculum for Candidates

We recognize the importance of formation as noted in paragraph 32 of the OCSO Guidelines on Formation: "Among the topics to be presented are the following: sacred Scripture, in particular the Psalms; the liturgy, especially the liturgy of the hours, with practical instruction in singing and public reading; the rule of St. Benedict; monastic history and spirituality, especially the Cistercian patrimony; instruction in prayer and Lectio; on the Vows and the meaning of religious life [parenthetically, this may well refer to our Plan of Life]; an introduction to the Christian mystery and Christian doctrine, and to the Constitutions and the Statutes of the Order."

In pursuit of a life of devotion to God and the Cistercian charism, our Formation Process is meant to better know and, as appropriate, live the following elements:

- **Holy Eucharist:** Daily reception of the Holy Eucharist is seen as an expression of our union with Christ and with one another.
- **Liturgy of the Hours:** Praying of one or more Hours of the Divine Office each day allows us to participate in the prayer of Christ for His Church.
- **Lectio Divina:** To encounter the Word of God we allow a period of at least 20 minutes a day for *lectio divina* and meditation.
- **Silence and Solitude:** As Lay Cistercians we strive to develop a Contemplative dimension within our lives by seeking opportunities for silence and solitude.
- **Devotion to Mary, Our Blessed Mother:** We pray the Rosary daily as a devotion to Our Blessed Mother and bring our day to a close by praying the *Salve Regina*.
- **Special Devotions:** Lay Cistercians have a special devotion to Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament; the Holy Trinity; Our Lady of the Assumption, Patroness of the Cistercians; St. Benedict and the Saints of the Cistercian Order; as well as personal patrons.
- **The Sacrament of Reconciliation:** Lay Cistercians are encouraged to receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation on a monthly basis, or more frequently as desired. This is consistent with living a life of continuous conversion.
- **Community Gathering Days:** Lay Cistercians preferably meet monthly in their local community for hours of prayer, study and community sharing. During this time we receive ongoing formation which facilitates our endeavor to incorporate Contemplative spirituality into our daily lives. Community members are encouraged to seek additional opportunities for prayer and sharing with one another as time and personal circumstance permit.
- **Annual Retreat:** The Lay Cistercians of Gethsemani are encouraged to spend one weekend at least every two years in a Contemplative-style LCG-organized retreat. Individual members are encouraged to schedule additional retreat time throughout the year as their personal time permits.
- **Work, Material Goods and Supporting the Church:** We strive to approach our work in the world with an attitude of reverence, balance, and thanksgiving. We care for all material goods entrusted to us as gifts from God. Lay Cistercians are encouraged to



contribute to the Church and the poor according to their means. When possible, we are associated with the Spiritual and Corporal Works of Mercy of Gethsemani Monastery.

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## FORMATION MODULES

**LCG formation is composed of 5 modules .** These modules are listed in a recommended sequence and emphasize a specific area of study and reflection appropriate for formation for the LCG candidate. The candidate's mentor(s) will advise regarding appropriate use of additional resources for the individual candidate.

- **MODULE I Developing the Candidate's Journey.**
- **MODULE II Review of the foundational elements**
- **MODULE III Cistercian History and Values**
- **MODULE IV Cistercian Studies and Writers**
- **MODULE V Assessment and expectations**

This formation guide is to be used by the candidate, with the assistance of community mentors, as a means of growing in the experience of living the values and practices of the Cistercian charism appropriate for Lay Cistercians. Much emphasis should be placed on the development of one's prayer life that includes contemplative prayer forms, Liturgy of the Hours, and lectio divina.

**The format for the completion of each module is up to the discretion of each candidate and mentor(s).**

Some individuals may choose to share their response and/or reflections on each topic verbally with the mentor during mentoring sessions. Others may find it beneficial to provide written responses. However, it is advisable that the candidate keep a **journal or notebook** to record their general reflections, insights, and learnings during the discernment period.

### **MODULE I Developing the Candidate's Journey.**

*Candidates will evaluate the importance of their Christian commitment as well as their motivation to become an LCG member. Basic elements of a lay contemplative spirituality will be evaluated. This will allow the candidate to explore the journey inward in the context of the reality of his or her life situation. If the candidate is called to this lifestyle, what demands does it call for and how is a contemplative life authentically lived as a layperson? How is her or his prayer life shaped in the context of the demands of an active life?*

It is appropriate as candidates begin their discernment in the lay contemplative life to assess their Christian life commitment and participation in the communal and liturgical life of their primary faith community/parish.

- What are the candidate's strengths and challenges?
- Read and discuss the **LCG Plan of Life**, which can be found on the LCG website.
- Candidates should evaluate and write an assessment of their Christian life. Examine strengths and weaknesses. They should look at their commitment to their Christian organization: their participation their personal prayer life, their knowledge of scripture. Once this is done, candidates should evaluate what is written and see what areas need to change (or whether change is necessary at this time.) They may (but need not) share this with their mentor.
- Based upon the elements of Cistercian Identity and the candidate's consideration of and devotion to living Christian values, they should discuss a plan with their mentor to fashion the mentoring process to best become aware of and devoted to the Cistercian charism.

## **MODULE II Review of the foundational elements**

### **The Rule of Benedict and Lectio Divina**

*Central to the Cistercian life is our foundation document: The Rule of Benedict. The Rule, as it is affectionately called, is the basis for much monastic life and serves as the core of most monasteries since it was written in the sixth century. Similarly, the daily practice of Lectio Divina and contemplation is necessary. In this module we will consider ways to become aware of and practice the Rule, Lectio, and Contemplation. It is suggested that the mentor and candidate spend at least two meetings to develop this element.*

- Read **Toward the Formation of LCG Members** on the LCG website. After reading it once, go back and take each section one at a time and reread. Candidates should reflect on each section and how their life is being formed, then document their reflections in their journal:
  - a. In the School of the Lord's Service;
  - b. Conversion of Manners or Modification of Lifestyle;
  - c. Learning to Pray;

- d. Being Formed by Lection Divina;
  - e. Formation of our Work; and f. Commitment.
- Read: ***On Loving of God*** by St. Bernard. Meditate on each chapter and journal thoughts.
  - Read one of **Martin Laird's books** on prayer and contemplation: ***Into the Great Silence*** or its companion work ***A Sunlit Absence***. Take a few weeks to read these and explore how to achieve greater attentiveness and awareness in life. Journal these thoughts.
  - **Rule of St. Benedict:**
    - a. The Rule of St. Benedict is the foundation for Benedictine/Cistercian life. As a Lay Cistercian an adaptation of the Rule will address its characteristic values that can easily be applied within the context of the lay lifestyle, such as, hospitality, conversion, humility, a balanced life, stability, and community. It is recommended that the candidate and mentor select a commentary on the Rule of St. Benedict for the candidates reading. What does prayer, work, study, humility, obedience, stability, silence, hospitality, community, etc., mean to a candidate as he or she strives to live the Lay Cistercian way of life?
    - b. Consider subscribing to the daily email offerings about the Rule from a source such as: Br. Jerome Leo [jeromeleo@stmarysmonastery.org](mailto:jeromeleo@stmarysmonastery.org).

## MODULE III Cistercian History and Values

*In this module, the candidate will begin to deepen his or her knowledge of Cistercian history and formative documents. These key documents were central to the foundation of the Cistercian Order and indicate important values and charisms.*

1. Begin a multi-meeting (recommended at least five meetings—with each adding additional reading or Cistercian materials from the appended suggested selections) discussion of **Michael Casey's *Exordium***. We suggest no more than one or two chapters at each meeting. Become familiar with the basic Cistercian documents:
  - i. **Charter of Charity;**
  - ii. **Exordium Parvum;**
  - iii. **and Exordium Cistercii.**

Discuss how the foundation and development of the Cistercian Order was infused with the Holy Spirit, a singular devotion to prayer and work. What distractions and entanglements were present at the beginning, how were they overcome, and how are these and similar barriers present in our lives today?

2. Familiarize yourself further with the foundation and expansion of the Order by reading one or more of the following works:
  - i. ***The Three Founders of Citeaux;***

- ii. ***The Cistercian Way;***
- iii. ***Waters of Siloe.***

3. Become familiar with the **Abbey of Gethsemani**, its foundation, growth, and the growth of the Lay Cistercians of Gethsemani, as well as the Lay Cistercian “identity.” This identity is shared by other lay Cistercian communities affiliated with monasteries around the world. The candidate should become aware of and comfortable with the emergence of the International Association of Lay Cistercian Communities which serves to focus and unify the widening application of the Cistercian charism. Use materials on the Abbey, LCG and IALCC websites. Consider the structure of LCG—the Abbey as hub with the LCG local communities as spokes around the hub. The Advisory Council, in conjunction with Abbey representatives, is entrusted to assure the continued integrity and devotion by members and our local communities to the Gethsemani Abbey and the Cistercian charism.

Review again:

- i. ***Lay Cistercians of Gethsemani Abbey PLAN OF LIFE (1989)***
- ii. ***Towards the Formation of LCG Members (2001)***
- iii. ***Lay Cistercian Identity (Huerta, 2008) (acknowledged and affirmed by LCG)***

An in-depth review and reflection of these three documents will enrich the course of study for the candidate. We expect candidates to become familiar with the application of the Cistercian charism in our lives as lay persons. These documents serve as primary tools in forming us as Lay Cistercians.

#### **MODULE IV Cistercian Studies and Writers.** *(A study of Cistercian history, fundamentals of Cistercian spirituality, foundational documents)*

*This module emphasizes the study of Cistercian spirituality by introducing the candidate to writings by key figures/authors in the Cistercian Order. The candidate should become familiar with these key authors who offered inspiration and guidance for the Cistercian way of life.*

1. ***Cistercian Studies:*** A review of Cistercian history, fundamentals of Cistercian spirituality, and the Cistercian foundation documents, such as, the Charter of Charity, will acquaint the candidate with the Cistercian tradition.

An introduction to the writings of

- St. Bernard of Clairvaux,
- Aelred of Rievaulx,
- and William of St. Thierry is also recommended.

2. ***Cistercian writings:*** As the candidate gains greater awareness of and comfort in the Cistercian way we seek to focus on the writings of Cistercians, the better to become

familiar with devotion practices. Simplicity, silence, solitude, and obedience are important Cistercian values; the candidate now gains greater knowledge of their origin, importance, and application in the life of the Abbey, of the Cistercian monks, and of our LCG members. For the next few meetings, building on the later chapters in the *Exordium*, the candidate should also read and discuss with the mentor one or more of the following works:

- *Aelred of Rievaulx, The Way of Friendship*, edited by Basil Pennington;
- *The Way of Simplicity*, by Esther De Waal;
- *New Seeds of Contemplation*, by Thomas Merton;
- *The Way of Humility*, by Andre Louf.

## MODULE V: Assessment and expectations

*To complete the mentoring process, as applied throughout, the mentor and candidate will add, as appropriate additional study to complete the awareness, devotion, and application of the Cistercian charism in the candidate's daily life. Selections are suggested from the attached listed materials as well as other nourishing elements gleaned by the candidate and mentor.*

*Also included in this module are a thorough understanding of the expectations and commitments for Lay Cistercians.*

- ***Expectations and Commitments for Lay Cistercians***

A discussion of expectations for Lay Cistercians in terms of commitment to the local LCG community life, plus support of the monastic community of the Abbey of Gethsemani is recommended between the candidate and mentor. The candidate is expected to evaluate their discernment and initial formation process. A written evaluation should include a response to the following questions:

1. What has been most challenging with your initial efforts to live the Plan of Life?
2. How has your life been impacted by following the spiritual path as presented by LCG?
3. Identify the disciplines and supports you will need to sustain your commitment in living the Cistercian charism as a LCG member.
4. What commitments are you willing to make to support your local LCG community?

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## IV Continuing Formation

The commitment made by a candidate at the conclusion of the initial period of formation is the first step toward authentically living the lay Cistercian way of life. Through continued engagement in local community life and ongoing formation the LCG member deepens and sustains his/her commitment.

The goal of continuing formation is the deepening of one's insights and experience in living a lay expression of the Cistercian charism. We realize that our lives in all of their dimensions, including spiritual, require continuing formation and development.

With regard to continuing LCG formation, it should be noted that there is a need to focus on both individual member and local LCG community formation. We also need to remind ourselves that lay Cistercian formation is not the same as monastic formation, even though some of the elements are similar.

Both individual LCG members and the local community are enriched by engaging in a regimen of continuing formation. The community is strengthened when its individual members are responsive to their community's need for leadership, formation, and a vibrant life of prayer.

There has been recent focus on formation at both the 2011 International Lay Cistercian Encounter at Dubuque and the OCSO General Chapter in Assisi. It is necessary for leadership of LCG communities to give priority to formation and its role with sustaining individual LCG member commitment and in the strengthening of the local community.

It has been stated numerous times that one's basic immersion in monastic life or in the lay Cistercian way of life is primary with regard to formation. For LCG members it is the living of the Plan of Life with intentionality and sincerity that will provide richness to one's experience.

The discussions at the Dubuque Encounter resulted in the highlighting of key factors for our consideration on formation:

- Our formation as Lay Cistercians is connected to our identity that was formulated at the Huerta Encounter in 2008. We must be formed in our identity.
- We must recognize that the Holy Spirit is the formator and works through the community to produce fruits in each stage of formation.
- The Cistercian charism is received through the relationship with a particular monastic community (Gethsemani).
- Lay Cistercian formation must make use of authentic Cistercian resources and mentors.
- The formation process includes the importance of discernment and of stages of formation.
- We must think of the process of formation as a process of guidance, rather than a program.
- The formation process should call forth the gifts and talents of members of the local Lay Cistercian community.

## Practical Considerations

It is highly recommended that LCG local communities in their initial approach to formation utilize the suggestions articulated by Fr. Michael in his formation paper, “**Toward the Formation of LCG Members.**” In his final suggestions, Fr. Michael writes “... ”

*Formation of the LCG is primarily the work of the Holy Spirit among you, in each group and each member. Formation is what happens when we live the whole of our lives in a Christian way, when this grace of the Holy Spirit is allowed to move through the whole of our lives...LCG members can do as much as anyone in applying early Cistercian texts to our daily lives. This is the work of the Spirit again; and if one begins to read the early Cistercian fathers and mothers, to read them persistently, it won't be long before they will suggest of themselves how the values they held sacred apply to our own lives...To taste the true richness of the Cistercian charism will demand sacrifice, of being truly honest about one's Christian priorities...There need to be members of the LCG who work hard at understanding the Cistercian theology and spirituality so as to articulate it to the group...Formation is about experiencing Christ amidst the ritual, the “School of Charity” of our everyday lives. Prayer will always be of the essence; for to be touched by grace, to know how each one of us is especially loved by God, is like rain on a fertile field recently planted. The necessary dying will take place so that the young plant will spring from the earth. Coming back to Christ again and again is to find that it isn't long and the field is ripe for the harvest.”*

Each LCG local community should develop a format for continuing formation of its community members. There are a variety of methods for structuring formation experiences and programs. There are numerous resources available for the community to use that include, for example, the listed reading material in Section VI of this guide.

Some common methods used by local LCG community include:

- **Group reading and discussion** of a book or text on a related topic of Cistercian and/or contemplative spirituality. An example would be a group study of the *Exordium*.
- **Individual members preparing presentations** to the community on a topic, such as, prayer, silence, simplicity, lectio divina, with reflection questions for group sharing.
- Providing opportunities for community members to **share their experiences**, successes and challenges of living the Plan of Life. Spiritual companionship should be encouraged among community members. Individual members can meet regularly for one-on-one sharing beyond the monthly community gathering.
- LCG members should be encouraged to share the content of their **spiritual reading** among fellow community members.
- **LCG communities can share days of prayer or reflection** and annual retreats, as a means of keeping grounded in prayer.

The ultimate consideration for us is the formation of our hearts. Are we putting on the mind of Christ? As St. Paul instructs us, "Be of the same mind of Christ Jesus." (Phil 2:5)

Ours is a lifelong process of integrating our Lay Cistercian formation with our continuing Christian formation.

## V Resources

### Primary

- A. *The Rule of St. Benedict*
- B. *LCG Plan of Life*
- C. "Toward the Formation of LCG Members"
- D. Lay Cistercian Identity (Huerta 2008)
- E. Ratio Institutionis: Guidelines on Formation (OCSO General Chapters)
- F. LCG Formation Guide (Revision 2011)
- G. "Ecumenical Considerations for the Lay Associates of Gethsemani (2010)
- H. Exordium

### Secondary

#### **LCG Reading List**

##### **Rule of St. Benedict**

*RB 1980: The Rule of St. Benedict in English.* Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1982.

*The Benedictine Handbook.* Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 2003.

Casey, OCSO, Michael. *Strangers To the City: Reflections on the Beliefs and Values of the Rule of Benedict.* Brewster, MA: Paraclete Press, 2005.

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