

## Lay Cistercian Charism ... Historical Synopsis

Source: LCG Website: <https://laycisterciansofgethsemani.org/about-us/>

### Our History

History—short version:

Beginning in 1987 a few laypeople, gathered occasionally at Gethsemani monastery, were welcomed by a sensitive monk who consistently and joyfully offered support. This Father Michael, then guest master now Prior, sensed the visitors' spirit was consistent with that of his monastic brothers seeking God.

These laypeople, nourished and linked by the Gethsemani hospitality and charism, loosely formed a community gathered annually to share their sense of wonder at this opening of God's grace in their lives. The community organized to create greater stability as they helped each other to apply their desire for simplicity and daily prayerful devotion in lives outside the monastic enclosure. Fr. Michael, other monk advisors, and lay representatives affirmed the *Plan of Life*, our founding document which aspires:

to serve as a guide for Lay Cistercians in their efforts to develop, in their secular life, a contemplative spirituality according to the Cistercian tradition. The Plan of Life reflects elements that are characteristics of the Cistercian monastic regimen of prayer, work and study. There is an emphasis on a modification of lifestyle that is similar to monastic conversion of manners.

A decade followed with enhanced appreciation, devotion, and practice of the Cistercian way. Others learned of the lay endeavor at Gethsemani and with bountiful energy and evangelist spirit the core inspired first two, then three, and four independent local communities (now eight) of six to twenty-five persons meeting monthly in Midwest USA cities, hundreds of miles apart yet bound to and inspired by Gethsemani and the Cistercian charism. Devoted laypeople organized each local community to meet monthly in prayer, lectio divina, exploration of the Cistercian charism, and in common devotion as lay people in a secular world. Support emerged for expanded communication among the communities: newsletter editors, web site managers, all with continued encouragement from Gethsemani.

Blessed with an open spirit of welcome LCG encouraged interest and applications from throughout the United States and Canada. LCG in 2008 was incorporated as an Illinois not-for-profit corporation and expanded an Advisory Council to include representatives elected by each of our eight local communities, and empowered to encourage greater devotion, depth, and understanding of the charism in our local communities and maintain an abiding affinity with Gethsemani. In 2012 LCG was recognized as a lay community affiliated with Gethsemani Abbey by vote of the Gethsemani conventual community and In 2015 LCG was determined a 501(c)(3) tax exempt entity.

LCG maintains devotion to the Rule of Benedict, the charism of the Cistercian Order, and to widening awareness of the lay Cistercian charism around the world.

September 13, 2016

Our history as observed and written by an early founder, Mike Johnson:

Since its founding in 1848 the Cistercian-Trappist Abbey of Gethsemani has held a revered place in the American spiritual landscape. Generations of retreatants have traveled to the knob hill country of central Kentucky for days of silence, prayer, rest and spiritual renewal that is available on retreat at Gethsemani. Find out more [here](#).Plan of LifePlan of LifePlan of LifePlan of Life

**Chart 1: In the table format below is a synopsis of the key phrase used to define the charism:**

<p><b>Veuillard Paper: Lay Participation in the Cistercian Charism</b>, Prepared by Dom Armand Veuillard <b>Prior to Huerta Retreat</b></p>	<p><b>2008 Identity Document: LAY CISTERCIAN IDENTITY:</b> Final synthesis extracted from three previous syntheses from Lay Cistercian communities and finalized at S.M.Huerta, June 6, 2008.</p>	<p><b>Peter Stuart Dubuque Report (May 2011) referencing</b>  <i>LAY CISTERCIAN IDENTITY finalized at S.M. Huerta, Spain, on June 6, 2008.</i></p>	<p><b>LCG Website</b>  <a href="https://laycisterci&lt;br/&gt;ansofgethsemani&lt;br/&gt;.org/plan-of-life/">https://laycisterci ansofgethsemani .org/plan-of-life/</a></p>
<p><i>Lectio divina</i></p> <p><i>Personal and liturgical prayer</i></p> <p><i>Simplicity of life</i></p> <p><i>Interior silence and contemplation</i></p> <p><i>Work as a way to holiness</i></p> <p><i>Community</i></p>	<p><i>Prayer and praise</i> <i>Confidence and abandonment to God</i></p> <p><i>Humility</i></p> <p><i>Obedience</i> <i>Poverty</i> <i>Chastity</i></p> <p><i>Austerity</i> <i>Simplicity of life</i> <i>A balanced life</i></p> <p><i>Silence and solitude</i> <i>Work</i> <i>Hospitality and service</i></p> <p><i>Stability</i> <i>Simplicity</i> <i>Joy</i></p>	<p><i>Frequent reception of the sacraments, having the Eucharist as the center of our lives</i></p> <p><i>The prayerful study of Scripture through Lectio Divina</i></p> <p><i>Fidelity to the Divine Office</i></p> <p><i>Filial devotion to the Virgin Mary</i></p> <p><i>Hospitality with our brothers and sisters</i></p> <p><i>A change of priorities</i></p> <p><i>A new way of ordering the day</i></p> <p><i>A new way of loving others through the Love of God</i></p> <p><i>The desire for formation and the necessity of spiritual guidance</i></p> <p><i>The experience of work as collaboration in the building of the Kingdom of God without our personal enrichment as our goal.</i></p>	<p><i>Silence</i></p> <p><i>Solitude.</i></p> <p><i>Simplicity</i></p> <p><i>Stability</i></p> <p><i>Service</i></p>

**Chart 2: Combining similar terms/concepts:**

Silence	Simplicity	Prayer	Work / Service	Community
<i>Silence</i>	<i>Simplicity</i>	<i>Lectio divina</i>	<i>Service</i>	<i>Community</i>
<i>Interior silence and contemplation</i>	<i>Austerity Simplicity of life A balanced life</i>	<i>The prayerful study of Scripture through Lectio Divina</i>	<i>Work</i>	<i>Hospitality with our brothers and sisters</i>
<i>Silence and solitude</i>	<i>Simplicity of life</i>	<i>Personal and liturgical prayer</i>	<i>Work as a way to holiness</i>	<i>Hospitality and service</i>
<i>Solitude</i>	<i>A change of priorities</i>	<i>Prayer and praise Confidence and abandonment to God</i>	<i>The experience of work as collaboration in the building of the Kingdom of God without our personal enrichment as our goal</i>	<i>A new way of loving others through the Love of God</i>
	<i>A new way of ordering the day</i>	<i>The desire for formation and the necessity of spiritual guidance</i>		
	<i>Humility</i>	<i>Frequent reception of the sacraments, having the Eucharist as the center of our lives</i>		
	<i>Stability Simplicity Joy</i>	<i>Fidelity to the Divine Office</i>		
	<i>Stability</i>	<i>Filial devotion to the Virgin Mary</i>		
	<i>Obedience Poverty Chastity</i>			

## Supporting materials/sources:

**Source: Veuillard Paper: Lay Participation in the Cistercian Charism, March 2008, Prepared by Dom Armand Veuillard  
Written by Dom Armand prior to and in anticipation of the Huerta Retreat**

### *What the Lay Cistercians Live*

*In spite of considerable differences in the way they function, the Cistercian values chosen by all the groups of Lay Cistercians are pretty much the same. They are the ones already mentioned in the letter of the Lay people to the General Chapters of 2002, that is, **lectio divina, personal and liturgical prayer, simplicity of life, interior silence and contemplation, work as a way to holiness.***

*The Cistercian life being essentially cenobitic, there is a certain consensus that, in order to be considered a “Lay Cistercian” it is not enough to be individually attached or connected to a community of monks or nuns nor to live a life inspired by the Cistercian spirituality or tradition alone in the world. One must belong to a group of Lay Cistercians. According to the sensitivities proper to each linguistic area, some spontaneously call these groups “communities”; others prefer the name “fraternity”; others hold to the more neutral term of “groups”. Probably this is simply a difference in cultural sensitivity. In certain cultural contexts the name of “**community**” is given to every group of persons who have a profound relationship and above all have a mutual care for one another whether they live together or not or even in the same place. In other cultural environments the name of community is reserved for groups of persons living together under the same roof.*

**Source: 2008 Identity Document: LAY CISTERCIAN IDENTITY:** This is the final synthesis extracted from three previous syntheses from Lay Cistercian communities (English, French, Spanish) and finalized at S.M. Huerta, Spain, on June 6, 2008.

*2.3 All the Cistercian values and practices, which are a means of liberation and internal conversion, can be incorporated in the life of laypersons: Got it. Thanks.*

*Prayer and praise*

*Confidence and abandonment to God*

*Humility*

*Obedience*

*Poverty*

*Chastity*

*Austerity*

*Simplicity of life*

*A balanced life*

*Silence and solitude*

*Work*

*Hospitality and service*

*Stability*

*Simplicity*

*Joy*

**Source: Peter Stuart Dubuque Report (May 2011) referencing: LAY CISTERCIAN IDENTITY finalized at S.M. Huerta, Spain, on June 6, 2008.**

*2. Lay Cistercian Life*

*2.5 We experience an inner and outer transformation (conversatio morum) which can be observed in the frequent reception of the sacraments, having the Eucharist as the center of our lives; the prayerful study of Scripture through Lectio Divina; fidelity to the Divine Office; filial devotion to the Virgin Mary; hospitality with our brothers and sisters; a change of priorities; a new way of ordering the day; a new way of loving others through the Love of God; the desire for formation and the necessity of spiritual guidance, and the experience of work as collaboration in the building of the Kingdom of God without our personal enrichment as our goal.*

Source: LCG Website: <https://laycisterciansofgethsemani.org/plan-of-life/>

### ***MODIFICATION OF LIFESTYLE (CONVERSION OF MANNERS)***

*Those who feel they have received the gift of the Cistercian charism and have been called to live a contemplative lifestyle according to the suggestions of the Plan of Life are not attempting to escape the realities of secular life. While recognizing the responsibilities of marriage, family and employment, they are embracing these commitments from a contemplative stance, integrating silence, solitude, simplicity, stability and service into their lives.*

*From one's inner self a person is able to connect with others and become more open and responsive to their brokenness and poverty. From this disposition one would be expected to share oneself, both spiritually and materially, with others in a spirit of building community. It is the task of the contemplative to build authentic human relationships.*

***Silence*** – *One should make a genuine effort spend time in silence during the day. The amount of time will vary given one's availability. Silence will allow one to be more centered and to discover one's inner depths.*

***Solitude*** – *Likewise, one should also regularly spend time alone that allows for deeper reflections and meditation.*

***Simplicity*** – *A natural outcome of growth in the spiritual life is a desire to live more simply. Moderation and discretion with respect to food, clothing, entertainment and material goods are suggested. Simplicity is a virtue that is difficult to acquire in our materialistic culture. The virtue of simplicity is very prominent in early Cistercian writings.*

***Stability*** – *A sense of stability keeps us grounded and committed to the spiritual path we have chosen. It also enhances our disposition to be faithful to our vocation in life and our love of God in all things.*

***Service*** – *Living the Christian life to its fullness should challenge one to serve others. This is how Gospel values of Christian love and justice are demonstrated. A person who grows in the contemplative life is sensitive to the needs of others and is moved to serve. Therefore, engaging in ministry and/or community service is expected*