

ASSOCIATES OF SOUTHERN STAR ABBEY, KOPUA  
REPORT ON THE INTERNATIONAL LAY CISTERCIAN ENCOUNTER  
DUBUQUE, IOWA, USA      21-27 MAY 2011  
by Peter Stuart

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**(A) Introduction**

This was the fifth such Encounter, preceded by the gatherings at Quilvo in Chile (2000), Conyers in USA (2002), Clairvaux in France (2005) and Huerta in Spain (2008). Important and necessary though the first three were, it's the most recent Encounters at Huerta and now Dubuque which have achieved the effective consolidation of the Cistercian Associate movement into an 'International Association of Lay Cistercian Communities'.

The Encounter at Dubuque went well. Huerta in 2008 was extraordinary in what it achieved; Dubuque 2011 was less demanding but also productive. The two Encounters go together. I sum it up this way: *'At Huerta the Spirit said, "This is who you are" and we said "Alleluia". At Dubuque we said "Amen, so be it" and the Spirit said, "Then become what you are" '.* In other words Huerta produced the Identity Document and established the International Association *ad experimentum*. Dubuque definitively established the Association as an ongoing entity, formulated a couple of key structural statements, and made a substantial start on a statement on Formation. The pity was that if we had had a little more time that particular statement could easily have been finalised.

For the key texts, see below (and [www.cistercianfamily.org](http://www.cistercianfamily.org) ), especially *'The Bonds of Charity That Unite Us'*, *'Statute on Membership'*, and *'Characteristics of Lay Cistercian Communities'*. They are brief and quickly read, though perhaps less quickly absorbed. The preliminary statement on Formation from the English-speaking group is also included. The presentations from Dom Armand Veilleux, Sister Gail Fitzpatrick, and Dennis Day (in the Appendices) are also all well worth your reading.

In this Report I've also included some preliminary documents from Huerta and OCSO General Chapter in 2008, to create a fairly definitive Report and compendium resource.

This is all genuinely historic stuff. The movement which began in the latter part of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century now has a structure and an identity, inclusive and flexible enough to accommodate the considerable variety of Associate communities around the world, yet recognisably 'Cistercian', and in the process of being recognised as such by the several branches of the Cistercian monastic family, each in their own way. (Most but not all Associate communities are linked to 'Strict Observance' monasteries like Kopua; but other branches were represented at Dubuque.)

## **(B) The Event**

This was the third Encounter I've participated in (after Clairvaux and Huerta), and it was great to see old friends. It was also the smallest of the three in size. The costs of travel and the venue, and the general economic situation, kept it small.

At Clairvaux we were standing on nine hundred-year old Cistercian soil; at Huerta, the monastery was almost as ancient. Clarke College, Dubuque, Iowa couldn't compete with these associations. Yet it has its own 170-year history, as a Catholic university in a predominantly Catholic town. It also has French and Spanish connections as well as Anglophone – so the three language groups in the Encounter were catered for by context as well as by simultaneous translation services.

We had Associates from Belgium, the Dominican Republic, France, Madagascar, Mexico, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Nigeria, Spain, the United States, and Venezuela. (Several countries present at Clairvaux and Huerta were not here this time.) A number of monastics were there, including several abbots/abbesses and the head of the Bernadines. It was a privilege to share with them. They were there as non-voting resource people, indeed most were the monastic advisers their monasteries had appointed to liaise with their Associate communities. For the record, there are now by my estimate 63 Lay Cistercian Communities, with 1185 members, in 20 countries (33 English-speaking, 18 French, and 12 Spanish). Kopua Associates are the 6<sup>th</sup> largest community.)

The International Association as of now has no members i.e. a 'clean slate' has been created. Each Lay Cistercian Community now has to link up afresh through its Abbot/Abbess (see the 'Statute on Membership'). This is the simplest way the International Committee and the Encounter delegates could see in order to clarify what is inevitably a somewhat confused and complex situation around the world. I don't perceive any difficulty in our (re)applying for membership as a 'Recognized Lay Cistercian Community', given the fact of our formal recognition by the Kopua Chapter and of the mandate from the Kopua Associates for membership of the International Association (through our 2009 questionnaire).

The Encounter facilities were excellent, as was the organisation. The infrastructure came courtesy of 'The Associates of the Iowa Cistercians', linked with New Melleray Abbey (monks) and Our Lady of the Mississippi Abbey (nuns), both of which we visited. My only complaint was that we had too much to eat! Even Cistercian restraint seemed to be overwhelmed by the US culture of excessive food consumption (a very real issue, by the way). When I tried to have my usual NZ breakfast, USA Associates asked if I were fasting.

I was nominated for the International Committee but fortunately wasn't one of the three elected.

One unscheduled but powerful feature of our time together was the evening presentation from Dom Armand Veilleux about the Atlas Martyrs. He was the one who had to identify them from their decapitated heads. (See the film, 'Of Gods and Men'.)

The networking was very fruitful. I established good relationships especially with our hosts The Iowa Lay Cistercians (New Melleray + Our Lady of the Mississippi); with Gethsemani; and with Conyers. We have much to learn from these particular Lay Cistercian Communities which face similar issues to our own, but we in turn may have something to give them. And there were also some recently-formed Associate communities there which found our own basic leaflet on Kopua Associates very helpful (e.g. watch out for a Belgian version).

I had a good few days afterwards at New Melleray (and again visited Our Lady of the Mississippi), and then spent four fruitful days staying with Bob Johnson in Chicago. Bob coordinates the very large group of Gethsemani Associates.

## **(C) Documents, with some comments**

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>LAY CISTERCIAN IDENTITY</b> <i>finalized at S.M. Huerta, Spain, on June 6, 2008.</i></p>
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### **1. Lay Cistercian Vocation**

As individuals, we recognize a personal call that is experienced in community as a gift from God. We define it as a call to be an active witness of Christ and his Church in the midst of the world, providing a prayerful and contemplative testimony in a life defined by the values of the Cistercian charism. This life is guided by the Rule of Saint Benedict as a concrete way to interpret the Gospel, and by our Cistercian Fathers and Mothers. This personal call is a means of continuous conversion, one that leads to a rediscovery and deepening of the grace of our baptism and the development of an adult faith.

### **2. Lay Cistercian Life**

2.1 We are convinced that it is possible to adapt Cistercian spirituality to the lifestyle of a lay person though it is very clear that there are two different ways to live it, monastic and lay, and both are complementary. This shows us the vitality of the monastic life. Lay people have found in Cistercian spirituality a way to live in the world with greater commitment and spiritual depth. We are unanimous in our belief that the Cistercian charism can be lived outside the monastery.

2.2 There are many ways to live the Cistercian Lay life – but although the forms may be different all have only one aim : " to seek God".

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:

- 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

2.4 This interior unification, this way of conversion, this desire for incarnation, is born and is realized in the choice of "preferring nothing to Christ" (RB 72), living in the world without being of the world (cf. John 17, 9-16).

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.

2.6 The coenobitic dimension of our Lay Cistercian life finds expression in our life in the spiritual union we experience with all the members of our lay community as well as with the monastic community. A more ascetic life allows us to be united in personal and liturgical prayer, as well as in work, despite being physically apart.

2.7 Our Mission as Lay Cistercians is realized through a life of witness, independent of whether we participate in pastoral and/or social activities. The fundamental element of our life is in finding balance between times of prayer and action.

### **3. Lay Cistercian Community**

3.1. The experience of community is described as the birth of a new family which gives us aid and strength to live a commitment to Christian life without fear and with hope. We believe that praying together creates communion which unites us over distance and fortifies us as well. We believe that the greater bond is to be united by the Holy Spirit in a common search: the search for God. Consequently

the community provides a personal enrichment through the transmission of values among all its members. Our discovery of community helps us experience ourselves as the Body of Christ. To experience the needs of others encourages charity and teaches humility. The community is a God-given means to our sanctification.

3.2. For a majority of communities, it is fundamental to formalize our chosen lifestyle with some type of personal commitment, made in front of both communities, lay and monastic, that gives voice to the desire and personal decision to respond to the call of God to this specific Lay Cistercian vocation.

3.3. There is great diversity in the way that communities organize themselves. In some communities we can say that there is a reluctance to create structures.

#### **4. Bond with the Monastery and the Cistercian family**

4.1. The monastic community is the heir of the Cistercian charism in its present form. Lay Cistercian communities, through their communion with a monastic community, receive light and formation from the monks and nuns. However, there are differences concerning the concrete bonds of union and the ways to describe these bonds.

4.2. We experience the two communities, monastic and lay, as a single family with different expressions of life. However, all are clearly aware of the difference between being lay and being monastic.

4.3. For all the groups, it is the monastic community, represented by the Abbot (Abbess), that recognizes in them the charism and confers on them their membership in the Cistercian family, according to the nature of the bonds that unite them.

4.4. It is common to all our communities and members to experience the monastery as our home and a place where the Lord unites, in a very special way, both communities, lay and monastic, and the members of both to each other. The hospitality of the monks and nuns makes the love of God present.

4.5 Being Lay Cistercians does not confer on us privileges in our relationship with the monastic community, but makes us aware of our duties and responsibilities.

4.6. Our Lay communities have, with different frequencies, meetings in the monastery in which we receive formation and learn to love one another in a new form of relationship centered on Christ, to which all the members have been chosen and called by God.

4.7. Monastics and laypersons learn fraternal life from one another, persevering together on the path to holiness.

4.8 Many members of lay communities go to the monastery individually. But all agree that in order to be Lay Cistercian it is not enough to simply feel attracted to a monastery, but that it is necessary to belong to a lay community.

#### **5. Epilogue**

5.1 We believe that Lay Cistercian communities are a work of the Holy Spirit, and, with little communication among ourselves, we have striven to live and experience the Cistercian charism in total communion. We believe that in the lives of Lay Cistercians, by the grace of God, the Cistercian charism that has been exclusively monastic for nine hundred years has found a new expression.

5.2 There exists in all Lay Cistercian communities the desire to respect and maintain diversity in all things that do not break the communion: to live the same charism with all the diversity of expressions while being strongly united in what is essential.

**Called and transformed by Christ  
Maria ! ---- Rabbouni !**

<p><b><i>Huerta 2008: Ad experimentum establishment of Association (extract from “The Bonds of Charity That Unite Us”)</i></b></p>
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Like the Cistercian monasteries, each Lay Cistercian Community is autonomous in relationship to one another, but they are all united by bonds of charity.

In order to make those bonds more concrete, the representatives of the various Lay Communities here present at the International Encounter of Santa María de Huerta, in June of 2008, decide to create an **International Association of Lay Cistercian Communities**, which will function *ad experimentum* till the next International Encounter, in three years.....



**Motion passed at OCSO MGM 2008 ( and see Dom Armand Veilleux's extended comments in Appendix One)**

*Dom Armand Veilleux writes:* The members of the *Steering Committee* elected at the Huerta Meeting were invited to the MGM of 2008 as they had been at that of 2005. They presented the document on The Lay Cistercian Identity to the meeting, and it was studied by four Mixed Commissions of the MGM.

These exchanges led to a vote acknowledging this phenomenon of the Lay Cistercians as a lay expression of the Cistercian charism.

“We recognize the existence of a lay expression of our Cistercian charism in the lived experience of the groups of lay persons associated with a number of the monasteries of our Order” (Yes 132; No 21; Abst 10).

***Dubuque 2011: the International Association is established permanently by passing a revised “The Bonds of Charity that Unite Us”***

Lay people, desiring to embody in their lives the essential values of Cistercian spirituality, have gathered together in communities attached to monasteries of Cistercian monks or nuns. The spirituality that inspires these Lay Communities is formulated in the document “Lay Cistercian Identity.”

In order to foster communion among themselves and with the Cistercian Family and, in the spirit of the Charter of Charity, these autonomous communities have united together in an *International Association of Lay Cistercian Communities*.

The present document describes the functioning of this Association.

The Association will hold a Meeting every three years.

At each International Meeting a Steering Committee composed of three members representing English, French and Spanish languages will be elected by the delegates. The main role of the Steering Committee will be to serve as an interface between the Lay Communities on the one hand and the Cistercian Orders and Congregations on the other. The Steering Committee will develop the necessary means required to maintain the Association. In addition, it will organize the International Meeting every three years.

Representatives of Lay Cistercian communities that are members of the International Association and who have been elected by their Lay Cistercian community will participate in this International Meeting. In addition, monastic representatives from the monasteries with which the communities are associated may participate.

In order to allow the proper functioning of the Association and its autonomy, each Lay Community that is a member of the Association will make a financial contribution. The Steering Committee will be responsible for managing the Association's accounts. A written financial report will be submitted to the membership at each international meeting.

Other expressions of the bonds of charity between the Lay Communities are, for example, regional meetings of the Lay Communities, sharing of resources, documents, reports, etc., and possibly joint meetings.

*(Approved unanimously at Dubuque, May 24, 2011)*

**Dubuque 2011: "Statute on Membership in the International Association of Lay Cistercian Associates"**

The Association is comprised of lay communities that are associated with a Cistercian monastic community. The Association recognizes two types of membership:

**1. Provisional Lay Cistercian Communities**

Before the time when a lay group receives official recognition from the monastic community it is associated with, there is a period of establishment, growth and development.

**2. Recognized Lay Cistercian Communities**

After a period of discernment, a monastic community "represented by its Abbot or Abbess" (*Identity Document*, 4.3) may decide to recognize a lay community as an "expression of the Cistercian Charism" (MGM 2008, Vote 71).

Lay Cistercian Communities complete an application form. This application, signed by the Abbot/Abbess, indicates which type of membership is relevant for the group making the application.

Only **Provisional** or **Recognized** Lay Communities associated with a Cistercian monastery may attend meetings of the Association.

If an Abbot or Abbess should rescind the recognition of a Lay Community, then that community's membership in the Association is rescinded.

*(Approved unanimously at Dubuque, May 25, 2011)*

[Comments:

- *The communities of Associates around the world vary hugely in organizational and spiritual maturity. It was realized that it would be helpful and wise to be both inclusive yet also cautious.*
- *One of the things at stake here is the integrity of the use of the word 'Cistercian' and the need of the world community of Cistercian monastic communities to know who and what they are relating to when dealing with the International Association. See especially Dom Armand's paper below.*
- *There is also the need to safeguard the autonomy and responsibility of each monastic community.*
- *Recently formed Associate communities can undoubtedly benefit from involvement in the International Association, and also enrich it.*

*Peter Stuart]*

**Dubuque 2011: "Characteristics of Lay Cistercian Communities"**

Lay Cistercian Communities, by their nature, share a great deal in common with one another and with the monasteries with which they are associated. They are all united by a bond of charity, a bond of fraternal love and support, and a bond of fidelity. There exists a frequent bond of prayer that deepens the love and respect of one for another.

The following is a list of objective characteristics of Lay Cistercian Communities that the Association recognizes:

1. Lay Cistercian Communities receive written recognition from the Abbot/Abbess of the monastery with which the lay community is associated.
2. Lay Cistercian communities are assisted by a liaison from the monastic community appointed by the Abbot/Abbess.
3. Lay Cistercian Communities recognize and adopt the Lay Cistercian Identity document approved in Huerta in 2008.

4. Lay Cistercian Communities have a Charter and Statutes, approved by its members, which outline the spiritual goals of the group as well as its functioning and the link it has with the monastery.
5. Lay Cistercian Communities have a leadership council, comprised of lay members, that is responsible for the administration of the group.
6. Lay Cistercian Communities have developed a formation program comprised of a curriculum of topics and learning activities that address the values and practices of the Cistercian Charism.

Note that this list of characteristics is not prescriptive in nature. The Association does not judge the quality of a Lay Community nor take this list of characteristics into account when a group applies for membership. Rather, it is in all cases the Abbot/Abbess of the monastery with which the group is associated that determines whether a lay community may become a member of the Association and at what level. This is, rather, a list of minimal and ideal characteristics that Lay Cistercians themselves have identified as worthy of emulation.

[Comments:

- *The autonomy of each Lay Cistercian community was jealously safeguarded*
- *Also jealously safeguarded was the right of each monastic community to validate the Cistercian character of the Lay Associate community linked to it.*
- *This is a useful list of characteristics which we would do well to ponder.*

*Peter Stuart]*

<b>Dubuque 2011: Formation (English group)</b>
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[The questions asked of each language group were:

- *Does the International Association need to develop a statement on formation? If so, what are some important things it should include? How could such a document be used?*
- *A formation program on paper may differ greatly from a formation program in practice. What are the most important aspects of a formation program for lay communities? Prioritize the list.*
- *Are there any ways that Lay Communities can support and help one another in the formation of their members? If so, what are these? And how can they be implemented?]*

Yes for the need for a statement on formation, with respect given to the autonomy of the individual communities. Inclusion :

1. Principles and purpose of formation.
2. Optimal content
3. Process (i.e. guidance not a program)
4. Tie into the lay Cistercian Identity document and Ratio
5. Emphasizes initial and ongoing formation.

How could it be used ?

- 1, Guideline for formators
2. With discernment of individual communities
3. Catalyst
4. Stimulate discussion
5. Resources with encouragement to use gifts within the group
6. With total confidence in the Holy Spirit.

**Question n° 2 :** The most important aspects:

We recognize the Holy Spirit is the formator, and works through these four elements in the context of each autonomous community:

1. Modeling and mutual accountability in living the charism

2. Fostering a relationship that includes immersion in a specific monastery and its lay community
3. Making use of authentic Cistercian resources and mentors
4. Recognizing the importance of discernment and of stages in formation

[Comments:

- *The other two language-groups came up with very similar responses. It will not take much to achieve an agreed synthesis, almost certainly before the next Encounter in 2014.*
- *Note the emphasis on the autonomy of each Lay Associate community.*
- *There was a very substantial paper presented by Fr Pierre-Andre Burton of Ste Marie du Desert on spiritual formation in the light of Cistercian tradition. I've not included it in this Report, but I and most others found it very useful, if rather too academic and abstract in the French manner.*
- *Watch this space.* *Peter Stuart]*

#### **D. Appendices:**

##### ***Appendix One - Dom Armand Armand Veilleux***

##### ***"The Lay people associated with Cistercian monasteries and their recognition by the OCSO"***

#### **I - Quick historical background**

##### **Origin**

There have always been lay people who have found a support for their spiritual life by the close association with a monastery of monks or nuns. There were often also groups of various natures attached to a monastery, calling themselves, for example, "the Friends" of this or that community, or groups devoting themselves to the study and the propagation of the Cistercian culture and tradition.

Since a little more than a quarter of a century a different phenomenon appeared and has not ceased growing. It consists of lay people living a great communion with a Cistercian community and feeling the call to embody in their lay life the essential values of the Cistercian spirituality.

Cistercian spirituality being primarily coenobitic, these lay people generally gathered in groups or communities of lay persons attached at a local monastic community.

##### **International meetings**

This movement developed to such a point that these groups of Lay Cistercians periodically organized International meetings to share their experiences and to see whether it were possible to receive a certain official recognition from the Cistercian Orders. There were the meetings of Quilvo in Chile (2000), of Conyers in the USA (2002), of La Grange of Clairvaux in France (2005), of Huerta in Spain (2008) and now of Dubuque in the USA (2011).

##### **General Chapters**

The existence of these Lay Cistercians, their regrouping in communities attached to various monasteries, and their periodic international meetings were mentioned at almost all the General Chapters of the OCSO since 1984, and was the object of a thorough study in Commissions at the MGM of 1993 and 2008. The Order always expressed an open and sympathetic attitude in their regards, without however wanting to legislate about them, recognizing the right and the responsibility for each community to have such a group.

Some Lay Cistercians were invited to the MGM de 1993 and the members of the *Steering Committee* were invited to the Chapters of 2005 and 2008. A member of the Order was designated by the MGM of 2005 to act as liaison between the Order and these groups and he was confirmed in his function by the MGM of 2008.

All these gestures constituted in an obvious way a semi-official recognition of this movement by the Order.

## Huerta 2008

The international meeting of Lay Cistercians at Huerta in 2008 had a particular importance. It had been prepared during the previous three years by a well-coordinated reflection on the level of the Regions or various parts of the Order. The participants prepared an important document called "Lay Cistercian Identity" in which they gave an expression to their Cistercian identity, describing the values that they wished to live and which they committed themselves to live. They expressed also the desire of some form of recognition by the Cistercian Order.

In another document called "Bonds of Charity", they constituted themselves as an International association of Communities of Lay Cistercians. The goal was not obviously to create a kind of Third Cistercian Order, nor even to constitute an International Association of Faithful, which would then ask to be recognized by the Holy See. The goal was simply to have a kind of permanent existence as a moral person, the members of each international meeting only being able to make this commitment for themselves. The constitution of this Association also allowed all the Lay Cistercians, as a moral person, to dialogue with the various authorities of the Cistercian Orders.

## MGM 2008

The members of the *Steering Committee* elected at the Huerta Meeting were invited to the MGM of 2008 as they had been at that of 2005. They presented the document on The Lay Cistercian Identity to the meeting, and it was studied by four Mixed Commissions of the MGM.

These exchanges led to a vote acknowledging this phenomenon of the Lay Cistercians as a lay expression of the Cistercian charism. (I will explain in a few moments the scope of this vote). In a second vote, the MGM asked the Regional Conferences to reflect on the document presented by the Lay Cistercians in order to see what the Order could assume.

All the Regions except one were able to carry out this reflection before the meeting of the Central Commissions at Tilburg in 2010. The Central Commissions decided to put the question on the program of the MGM of 2011 where it will be treated according to the ordinary procedure, i.e. by four Mixed Commissions.

The Central Commissions asked me to prepare a document on the work of the Regions on this subject. This is that document.

## II - The MGM of 2008 and its follow up

### Importance of vote 71

"We recognize the existence of a lay expression of our Cistercian charism in the lived experience of the groups of lay persons associated with a number of the monasteries of our Order" (Yes 132; No 21; Abst 10).

One cannot not insist strongly enough on the importance and the scope of this vote. The General Chapters and the MGM since Holyoke (1983) had given an indirect and semi-official recognition to this movement. In 2008, we have an official and very clear recognition. It is important to weigh well all the elements in the formulation of this vote.

The recognition relates to **groups**, not on individuals. It relates to **groups attached to monasteries of our Order**. That obviously does not imply any value judgment on what can be lived by individuals not attached to any specific group, or by groups not attached to any monastic community. What is limited here is quite simply the breadth of the field on which the Order can make a decision and about which indeed it decides. The MGM OCSO could obviously not make decisions about the groups attached to monasteries of other Orders.

What the MGM, i.e. the two General Chapters of Nuns and Monks affirm in this vote goes beyond all that which the fervent promoters of this movement could have hoped for. The MGM affirms that "We recognize the existence of a lay expression of our Cistercian charism in the lived experience of the groups of lay persons associated with a number of the monasteries of our Order".

Such an approach presupposes an attitude which it is important to mention. This attitude, that one finds in various documents of the Order since the Vatican II Council, consists in conceiving that the

“Cistercian charism” is larger than the whole of the institutions officially recognized as Cistercian. This charism does not belong to the Cistercian Orders, nor even to the whole of the present monks and nuns. Like any charism, it belongs to the whole Church, that is, to the whole of God's people. If God wanted this new expression of the Cistercian charism to appear, as He had caused several other expressions to appear in the past, it is our responsibility “to recognize it”.

Once this recognition was affirmed, the question which followed logically was: “What attitude should the Order (and more precisely the General Chapters that made this recognition) take vis-a-vis this new expression? ”. The discussions made in Mixed Commissions of the MGM on the document “Lay Cistercian Identity” were not concrete enough to allow the Commission of Coordination of the MGM to formulate votes on this subject. It limited itself to formulating a vote (n° 72) asking the Regions to continue the study of this document “so as to see what we as an Order can assume”. It should be recognized that the last part of this last vote is not completely clear, and the Regions hardly touched this question.

### **The position of the Regions**

A good synthesis of the reflection of the Regions is to be found in the Minutes of the meeting of the Central Commissions at Tilburg in 2010.

As a whole, the Regions take for granted vote 71, even if all do not seem to have perceived all the scope of it. In any case, nobody calls this vote into question.

A certain number of Regions -- about half -- think that we should limit ourselves to this declaration of 2008 and not to legislate more. The others think that it would be necessary or convenient to establish criteria for the recognition of a group of Lay Cistercians attached to a given monastic community. In any event, all the Regions raise sufficient questions for the Central Commissions to decide to put this whole question (and not only such or such aspect) on the program of the next MGM (“We wish to place the topic of Lay Cistercians on the programme of the MGM of 2011”).

In what follows I will try to describe, starting from the minutes of the meetings of the Regional Conferences, the questions which still arise and to which the MGM of 2011 will have to endeavor to give an answer.

### **III - Questions and concerns**

#### **A) The question of the Cistercian Identity**

This question had been raised and lengthily discussed at Huerta within the context of the formulation of the document “Lay Cistercian Identity”. Within the framework of this discussion it had become obvious that it was not a question, for anyone, “to confer” this Cistercian identity on a group, but simply “to recognize it”.

One or the other Region suggests that one do not speak any more of “lay Cistercians”, but of *Associates* of such or such monastery. To that one can answer that the MGM of 2008 already went beyond this problem, by recognizing explicitly the Cistercian character of the lived experience of such groups.

As the MGM speaks explicitly about groups attached to a monastic community, the fact of belonging to a group and the relationship with a monastic community seem essential for this recognition.

#### **The role of the monastic community**

All that was said at the General Chapter, in the discussions in Mixed Commissions as well as in the Plenary assembly seems to go in the following direction: it belongs to the local monastic Community to recognize or not to recognize the “Cistercian” character of what a group attached to the community lives.

The Order is a community of communities, within which the important orientations are made in a collegial manner at the General Chapter. During approximately a quarter of a century the Order let the movement known as of the Lay Cistercians evolve freely, counting on the responsible attitude of each community. But from the moment when the Order, in an official and collegial way, recognized the Cistercian character of the lived experience of such groups, it is normal that the Order establish certain criteria for this “recognition” which it chose to assume. This is why several people think that the Order



should at least establish some criteria for the whole of the Order to be able to assume the recognition made by the local community.

At the least, an explicit intervention of the Superior in the name of the community is considered necessary. From this point of view it is not enough that a group be formed around a monk or of a nun, even if it is with a kind of implicit agreement from the superior. There must be at least a degree of intervention by the superior so that one can speak about a recognition made by the community.

Out of a preoccupation of justice towards the whole monastic community as well as towards the lay community, some Regions suggest that such an official recognition be made not by the superior alone but by a vote of the conventual Chapter. On the one hand that would ensure that the decision is not made without a serious examination and, on the other hand, this Community decision could not be cancelled easily.

#### **Not recognized groups and isolated people**

It is clear that the “recognition” given by the Order in its vote 71 of the MGM of 2008 does not apply to groups of sharing, prayer, etc., which are not connected with a specific monastic community and are not explicitly recognized by one. This not-recognition does not imply any value judgment on what these groups live. It does not seem however legitimate on their part to give themselves the title of “Cistercian”.

It is the same thing with the isolated persons who live -- or consider that they live -- the Cistercian spirituality, even in a close union with monks or nuns or with a community. What they live corresponds rather to the situation of oblates. The oblate situation is a primarily an individual membership, even if several oblates of a monastery can meet for common exercises. The reality recognized by the MGM of 2008 is a primarily Community reality.

#### **Some additional questions**

**Responsibility:** One or the other Region said that the Order as such should not assume responsibility vis-a-vis the movement of Lay Cistercians. To that one can answer that by inviting representatives of Lay Cistercians to the meetings of the MGM and especially by the vote 71 of the last MGM, the Order already assumed its responsibility in their connection. It could give it up only by going back on that decision. Would this be responsible?

**Cistercian family:** One Region asks that we do not recognize Lay Cistercians as belonging to the *Cistercian Family*. On this subject one must clarify that the concept of “Cistercian Family” is not a legal concept. It is simply a beautiful expression permitting to cover as a whole all the Orders or Congregations or other institutions in which the Cistercian Tradition and Spirituality are lived. The Blessed Jean-Paul II himself spoke about the Lay Cistercians as pertaining to the Cistercian family, in his message with the Cistercian Family in 1998.

#### **The question of Association**

With the passing of years Lay Cistercians held various meetings, as I mentioned above. At each one of these meetings the participants present could speak only in their own name and in the name of their respective groups. Even if a team was elected to prepare the following meeting, the group which had elected them ceased existing at the end of the meeting and this team did not have any moral person to whom to give an account of its work. Even the *Steering Committee* elected at meeting of La Grange in 2005, at the suggestion of Dom Bernardo Olivera, did not represent any moral person. In Huerta, the participants decided to constitute themselves, on an experimental basis, as an International association of the Communities of Lay Cistercians. This Association is not an International association of Faithful in the canonical sense, which would be approved by Rome and which would be an autonomous lay branch in relationship to the Chapter of the Abbots and with that of the Abbesses. It is simply an organisational structure that the existing groups give themselves in order to manage the communication between them and with the Order.

## Conclusion

At the time of the next General Chapters, or MGM of Assisi 2011, the Cistercian Order of the Strict Observance will have:

- 1) to take note that it has already recognized the groups of lay Cistercians attached to communities of the Order as a new expression of the Cistercian charism. Nobody suggested calling into question this decision of 2008.
- 2) to confirm that it extends this recognition only to the groups (and not to the individuals) clearly attached to a local community, unless it wants to decide differently on this point which does not achieve the unanimity.
- 3) to decide if it wants to establish criteria or conditions which will have to be applied so that a community of Lay Cistercians can be actually regarded as being really attached to a monastic community.
- 4) to decide if it wants to recognize the Association of the communities of Lay Cistercians and the Coordinating Committee (Steering Committee) as its interlocutor in all that relates to the relations between Lay Cistercians and the OCSO.
- 5) to decide if it again wishes to elect a member of the Order as a liaison between the Order and the Lay Cistercians.

### *Appendix Two - Sister Gail Fitzpatrick*

#### **"The Hopes and Fears of the monks and nuns of the Order concerning Lay Cistercians"**

I recall the last time I was with the Lay Cistercians of our Order was at Conyers in 2002. It was a very happy occasion for me and for all of us who were with you at that time. It was only the second meeting of the international group of associates and there was an air of foundation – a beginning that no one could predict into the future. Much has evolved in your history as Lay Cistercians since that time.

Now the steering committee for this meeting has asked me to speak about the hopes and fears of the monks and nuns of the Order regarding this movement that is taking place. I accepted but very quickly I realized it was an impossible task. How could anyone know what all the monks and nuns of the order think about anything? It is extremely difficult to reach everyone in the Order and even more difficult to get monks and nuns to answer a questionnaire. But with the limited resources I have I will give you what seems to be on the minds of many. These thoughts or opinions have been gleaned from several sources.

The main source is my own experience, along with our communities of Mississippi and New Melleray. In response to a few questions I circulated among both of these groups, they spoke with me about what they think and feel. This is obviously valuable but limited. Dubuque, Iowa in the middle of the United States is wonderful, but limited.

In answer to a short questionnaire I send to 26 houses of the Order I received 16 responses. That is about 62%. That was a high rate of return and I am grateful to all those who responded to my e-mail. The responses I received represent North America, France, Africa, Ireland, and Holland. I would like to begin with this more global picture and then come down to our local experience at the end.

The first question I asked each community was: *In general is your community supportive of the groups of Associates or Lay Cistercians that have begun to form in relation to individual monasteries.*

All the communities answered Yes with one exception. The community that said No, also said that the groups that are already formed should continue.

It was understood that an affirmative to that question did not necessarily mean that those communities all had groups associated with them...or that they would choose to have one.

That is pretty overwhelming when you think about it. There was a similar proportion just within the New Melleray and Mississippi communities. All were supportive of this movement with two exceptions. I find that very heartening.

So there is strong support of the Associates that have formed in relation to communities of the Order and this movement is seen by many as the work of the Holy Spirit. The vote taken at the General Chapters in 2008 had already indicated that direction.

Just in case you have not memorized this historical vote I will repeat it for you. When things get confused and a little crazy you might want to ruminate this text like a mantra. I personally think it is very important and I might even say, extraordinary. Not having been at that meeting I may hear that vote with ears that are not bogged down by a lot of preliminary dialogue.

*Vote 71 We recognize the existence of a lay expression of our Cistercian charism in the lived experience of the groups of lay persons associated with a number of the monasteries of our Order.* yes - 132 no – 21 abstain– 0 (over 86%) Wonderful!

The second question I posed to the communities in the questionnaire was: *In general does your community have difficulties with these groups? and if so, for what reasons.* I join to that the fourth question: *Can you express any fears you may have for these groups?*

So in summary what follows are the fears and/or difficulties raised by communities concerning the Lay Cistercians. Before we proceed further we need to remember that fears are, by their nature, hypothetical. They do not necessarily correspond to reality. Some may, and others may not.

1. These groups may involve communities in pastoral ministry that is not ours and for which we do not have resources or training.
2. Hosting meetings involves distraction, time and energy as well as possibly disturbing peace and prayerfulness of monastery.
3. Some groups can seem to intrude into the community life, or even “take over” and speak as the authentic voice of Cistercian spirituality. There is a concern that a group, or individuals in a group, may divide a community. (This can be unconscious and as much the responsibility of the community members as the associates.)
4. No standard formation program is in place yet so it is left up to individual groups. Can formation and ongoing development happen in that case? Are there objective criteria by which a group can be considered Associates of Cistercians?
5. Some groups are larger than the community. Not easy to find liaison or teachers.
6. There can be too much copying of religious life, ex. postulant, novice, vows, etc. When that happens boundaries can be blurred.
7. Will they become just another therapeutic group or intellectual reading club? Or will they be a forum for gripes with the institutional Church?
8. The fear or concern that was voiced most often is one that was also mentioned in the discussion at the MGM. In the future will a community be forced to accept a group of associates against its better judgment.
9. Groups that accept non-Catholics have to deal with the difficult situation of reception of Eucharist...also how do groups deal with the controversial issues of abortion and gay marriage, etc. or should they?
10. The second most often mentioned fear is that of the name. Several prefer that “Cistercian” not be in the official name as a noun. So Associates of Iowa Cistercians would be okay, but not Lay Cistercians of Iowa.
11. It happens that the Abbot/Abbess is sometimes called upon to resolve tensions in the group. That can be an added burden for the superior.

Well, all that sounds a bit heavy, doesn't it, but remember the resounding affirmation of Vote 71.

What follows are the responses to the third question: *What are your hopes for the Lay Cistercians or Associates?*

Many were of a spiritual nature:

1. That members continue to be enriched spiritually by being associated with Cistercians.
2. That their own faith life will deepen and that they can be a leaven of love in society as well as a source of support to each other.

3. That their presence in their own family and community can raise awareness and appreciation of the function of Contemplative life and of ongoing conversion to Christ in the Church and in the world.

Others spoke of the structure of the groups themselves.

4. They hope that the groups move forward to develop a viable formation plan for themselves and clarify expectations concerning membership.
5. That the groups come to consensus about their own leadership without undue dependence on their contact monastery or on the Order.
6. That their **lay** identity be maintained at all times.
7. **And a final note of care:** that they be granted the grace of perseverance! As you know, that is the last word of Saint Benedict also: May He bring us all together to eternal life. I think Saint Benedict would be happy to be in our midst today and just smiling and saying, yes, yes, what a wonderful Spirit. May the Spirit bring us all together to everlasting life!
8. One more point: three of the communities (of nuns) said “we enjoy the lay associates”. I thought you’d like to hear that.

Now I would like to turn to our local communities. The concerns expressed by New Melleray and Mississippi are pretty much the same as have been mentioned in the above responses from the Order at large, but here I had the advantage of listening to individual monks and nuns.

I won’t repeat the concerns or hopes that are exactly the same as above, but there were a few new ideas that seem worth mentioning in addition to what has already been voiced.

1. There was a concern mentioned by both of our communities that our Associates might expect too much from the monks and nuns, and that they could become disillusioned. In other words our humanity begins to show the closer you get to us. The lovely white robes up in the choir stalls all of a sudden have spots and wrinkles. That’s a risk for all of us, isn’t it?  
There is a flip side to that which was also mentioned. Associates can grow in compassion towards the very people they look up to and especially if they see that monks and nuns try to be compassionate towards one another’s weaknesses.
2. Someone asked: do our associates experience real acceptance or mere tolerance? For him that was a concern.
3. The last concern is about us. Monks and nuns can use lay groups as an escape from the challenges of community life and the demands of the hidden life. I would add: we can use other things, too.

It was in the hope for Lay Cistercians that I thought some creative ideas emerged. The brothers and sisters also understood this question to mean **values** both for the lay associates and for the monastics. How are these groups valuable for the lay members themselves and for the monastics?

1. The presence of the lay group is a valuable support to the monastery. They help the monastics to remember who we are called to be in the church. They enrich the Cistercian charism by witnessing to its Spirit in lay life. The lay group can also be an avenue for vocations to the monastery directly or indirectly. (this has actually happened here)
2. Sharing our charism deepens the prayer life of the associates and of the monastics by the constant challenge to be what we say we are. This mutual support in prayer is not measureable but it is palpable.
3. For the lay members it is a bond that assures them they are not alone in their search for God and faithfulness to prayer. (this one touched me very much). It refers both to their bond with each other and their bond with the monastic community.

As I listened to these thoughts from the communities and monks and nuns who spoke with me I have a strong sense that most recognize the Spirit of God creating something beautiful in our midst and something important. It is new – new for us as an Order and therefore there are many unknowns

involved, but it is consistent with our history. For me this work of the Spirit is a clear sign of life and hope for the future.

I believe the fears expressed a sense of our own inadequacy to meet the challenge of formation and of accompaniment rather than fear about the validity of the movement itself. One of our monks wrote: I have the same concerns for the Lay Associates that I would have for any new adventure in the Holy Spirit.

Before closing I'd like to share a brief conversation I had recently with a woman who joined our Associates in initial formation just over a year ago. She told me that a mutual friend who celebrated Eucharist in our monastery many times over the years used to tell her that we were not always on the cutting edge of liturgical changes, and we would be catching up on the latest liturgical changes a little after the rest of the universal Church. She said with a smile, now I want to tell Father that after a year in the Associates I'm getting to be the same way.

So be careful, you may pick up some of our bad traits as well as a few good ones. Association does create likeness.

For myself, I have witnessed the evolution of the Lay Associates of our two monasteries from the very beginning. It seems to me to have been a continual movement into authenticity and depth. There have been many challenges and difficult situations to face. I believe that wherever "community" is taken seriously there will be challenges. Jesus understood that very well. He told us it is especially when we are gathered together that he is in our midst. Jesus understood the human heart well and how difficult human beings find it to live together in harmony and dynamic hope. So He promises to be with us in a special way when we gather to pray together. (Mt. 18:20)

Over the years questions of leadership, accountability, the basics that create membership, the need for written Constitutions (or not) etc. arose in our AIC (Associates of Iowa Cistercians). These were not easy questions to sort through. The older members of our AIC will be the first to tell you that for years they were allergic to rules and designated leaders within their own ranks. But life together has demanded both in some form.

I don't know the precise questions you will focus on during this meeting but based on what I have heard from the Order and experienced in our own local Associate group, I would like to make one observation and suggestion.

Communities are like people. They change. They grow and they diminish. And then often enough communities have a way of resurrecting, and then they move on again with new life. This can happen in a short span of time. This is true of the monastic community with which you are associated and it is also true of your own associate community. So it seems to me that the center of gravity in your community has to be within yourselves, not in the monastic community you love and support. **It is the Christ in you who is your life.**

Practically that would mean that gradually your formation, your leadership, your decisions will be marked by the Spirit in you as you integrate monastic principles within your own lives as lay persons. In saying this I am not recommending a break with the monastic community. That association with a Cistercian community is essential for maintaining the Cistercian charism. It is vital. But in whatever way the lay associates can maintain that contact while also maintaining their unique call...that is the particular challenge you face, in my view.

Trust God. If this is of the Spirit, as we believe it is, this movement will flourish.

My prayer for you is the prayer the Abbess prays for a novice as she receives the Cistercian habit: May God bring to completion in you that which he has begun.

### *Appendix Three - Dennis Day*

#### **"The goals of this week's meeting" (abridged)**

You will receive several assignments during the coming week, but perhaps one the most difficult will be that you represent not only your own lay community, but also all lay communities associated with Cistercian monasteries. This does not mean that you should leave behind your lived experiences

individually or in community, but rather that you must bring with it a broader perspective that includes not only your local expression of the Cistercian Charism, but also the entire movement of which you are a part. As Paul says, we are no longer Greeks and Jews, but rather we are all one in the Spirit.

.....The three goals of this week's meeting are:

1. Reflect on and share the relationships that our Lay Communities have with the monastery with which they are associated.
2. Reflect on and share what formation means for Lay Cistercians.
3. As we decided in Huerta in 2008, establish a permanent Association of Lay Cistercian Communities.

.....The following two paragraphs are from the OCSO website describing "Lay Cistercians":

*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.*

In the eyes of many monks and nuns, there seem to be **two** types of groups associated with Cistercian monasteries: 1) those **traditional** groups that find in the monastery "an inspiration and a support for their Christian life", and 2) those **new** groups, called Lay Cistercians that "have felt called to integrate into their lay vocations...the most fundamental values of the Cistercian life." There is a contrast here between traditional groups such as support groups, friends of the monastery, retreat groups, AA groups, book discussion groups, etc., and new groups such as the lay communities that you all represent. However, since both groups find at the monastery "an inspiration and a support for their Christian life", it may be difficult from some monks and nuns to distinguish between the two.

In preparation for this meeting, we asked your groups to respond to a survey that focused on implementation of the *Identity* document and the relationship of your groups with your monasteries. In general, the survey provided three interesting insights:

- 1) with regard to the *Identity* document, some groups (generally the larger and older ones) tended to rate its relevance and usefulness as neutral or somewhat low, whereas other groups saw in it an opportunity for self-reflection and growth,
- 2) with regard to the relationship groups have with their monasteries, there was a very wide range of responses reflecting a continuum of very "close" relationships to very "loose" relationships with individual monasteries, and
- 3) with regard to changes in the group's relationship with the monastery since Huerta, most groups indicate that those relationships have improved or remained about the same, while a few indicated that there have been no changes whatsoever.

Before looking at these surveys a little more closely, I would like to provide a summary of what I heard in Dom Armand's and Sister Gail's talks yesterday. The question I would like to answer is: "What is the impact of the relationship between a group and the monastery it is associated with?"

1) Physical Impact

a) Impact on physical resources

[Any group associated with a monastery demands a certain amount of resources. And yet some monasteries are very small; some have aging communities; some are lacking resources to form their own novices. A lay community may simply be "too much" for a monastery to take on. What is a lay community to do?]

i) Physical resources: space, time, etc.

ii) Personnel resources: monks and nuns to act as liaisons, spiritual directors, teachers, etc.

b) Impact on enclosure



- i) A lay group can disturb the peace and prayer of the monastery
  - ii) A lay group creates demands of time and energy and this may distract a monk or nun from his/her contemplative vocation
  - iii) A lay group can make demands on hospitality when a “special relationship” with the monastery is assumed
- c) Impact of personalities
  - i) Strong lay personalities can “mis-lead” the development of the group  
[For instance, a lay leader in a lay community may have definite preconceptions about what it means to live the Cistercian Charism. However, at times these ideas may not conform to the shared experience of other lay communities.]
  - ii) Strong monastic personalities can “mis-form” the development of the group  
[In some monastic communities, the lay community is seen as the purview of one particular monk or nun. At times, the ideas, hopes and aspirations of this monk or nun may not conform to the shared experience of other lay communities, or may not be shared by his/her brothers and/or sisters.]
- 2) Spiritual Contact
  - a) The lay community, as well as the monastic community, can be enriched spiritually by the relationship between the two
  - b) The Charism of contemplation and conversion can have a positive impact on laymen and women and the world they live in
- 3) Formation
  - a) There is a perception among some monks and nuns that lay communities need to have a formation plan

Lay identity must be maintained and distinctions between lay and monastic communities should be emphasized. Lay groups should embody the spirit of the Rule/Charism, but should not emulate monastic structures.

[Many groups indicate in their Constitutions that they base their structure, processes and decision-making on the Rule. This is seen by most monks and nuns as appropriate. However, for some there may be an over-dependence on monastic models. Blurring the distinctions between monks and nuns on one hand and laymen and women on the other has the potential of diminishing both.]

- b) Need for confidence and perseverance
- 4) Structure
  - a) Lay groups should structure and administer their own needs

[There are two assumptions in this statement. The first is that some sort of structure is required for a lay community to exist. Structure is sometimes a difficult concept to work with, especially when a group is young. For some groups, structure is seen in extremely negative terms, almost as a betrayal of the call one feels from God. However, as one Associate once said: “What makes us think that we can be structure-less when we are associated with a Cistercian monastery? What is a Cistercian monastery if not highly structured?”]

The second assumption is that this structure needs to be generated by the lay community itself, not imposed by a monk or nun, and that the day to day leadership of the group should be in the hands of laymen and women. This may be a challenge for laymen and women who lack confidence in themselves or for some monks and nuns who believe that what is done in the monastery can be easily replicated in the world of the layman or woman.]

- b) What's in a name? Should groups associated with a monastery call themselves "Lay Cistercians"?

[One of the things that the Steering Committee has learned is that it is necessary to be precise about the words we use and the meaning of those words. For instance, although we all call ourselves Lay Cistercians, none of us are actually "Cistercians" at all. A "Cistercian" is a monk or nun who is a member of a coenobitic community that lives in a specific monastery. Lay Cistercians, on the other hand, are laymen and women living in the world and who have chosen to base their lives on the values and practices of the Cistercian Charism. Thus, for monks and nuns, the word "Cistercian" is a noun; for us, lay men and women, the word "Cistercian" is an adjective that describes the foundation upon which we have chosen to base our lives. The question arises then: is it appropriate that we call ourselves "Lay Cistercians"? Should we find another word that describes who we are?

Sister Gail suggested the word "Associates" might be a better description of who we are—for instance, the Associates of some monastery, the Associates of Genesee, the Associates of Gethsemani, etc. For us here in the United States, the word "associates" has the right meaning and connotation. However, I understand that in certain countries, the word "associate" has a negative connotation, and that a word like "fraternity" would be more appropriate. In the United States, however, the word "fraternity" has a negative connotation. And so, if we decide to address this issue, I suggest that we not focus on finding one word that fits all in all languages, but rather that we find the right word in each language that describes our relationship with our monastery.]

.....And now I would like to provide a brief overview of the types of relationship with monasteries that appeared in the surveys that you returned. As I read over the surveys you provided, it seemed to me that our relationships with monasteries can be described using a continuum with "close relationship" at one end and "loose relationship" at the other. Remember, however, that most groups fit somewhere "in between"—somewhere along the continuum and not at either extreme. However, there is an implied bias in this—a bias that suggests that a "close" relationship is better or more authentic than a "loose" relationship. Here are some of the characteristics of our lay groups:

"Close" Relationship	"Loose" Relationship
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Some meet regularly at a monastery</li><li>• Some have an appointed liaison from the monastery who meets with the group's leadership</li><li>• Some receive guidance and instruction in the Cistercian charism from monks/nuns</li><li>• Some have received official recognition from their monastery</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Some meet occasionally or only once a year at a monastery</li><li>• Some have no monastic input to their group's leadership</li><li>• Some receive no guidance or instruction directly from monks/nuns</li><li>• Some have not received any recognition from their monastery</li></ul>

Most of us would agree, I think, that a "close" relationship with a monastery is, when it is possible, the ideal. And some might conclude, at first glance, that there is a qualitative difference between these two types of relationship. However, I do not think that is true.

Many groups, like the monasteries with which they are associated, must face constraints—constraints such as members' distance from the monastery, the size of the group, the resources the monastery and the group have available, etc. Lay communities are nothing if not creative. Let me give a few examples of some of the ways groups have tried to overcome some of these constraints. When members of a group live a great distance from and are not able to have their meetings at the monastery:

- Some groups have community retreats at the monastery at least once a year and have more regular meetings at a location that is convenient to the membership but away from the monastery;

- Some groups meet regularly, but away from the monastery, either in person or on-line, to listen to an audio recording or to read a letter from a monk or nun, and to discuss that material;
- Some groups invite other Lay Cistercians to visit and make a presentation to the community;
- Some groups read material such as Michael Casey's course on the *Exordium* and, using the questions provided by Fr. Casey, discuss it in community;
- Some groups periodically have a "visitation" by the group's monastic liaison in which the liaison meets with the group's leadership as well as with individual members of the community;
- Some groups invite a monk or a nun from a monastery other than the one with which the group is associated to make a presentation or to act as liaison;

These are all creative ways of overcoming some of the constraints of distance and size that groups face. However, the last characteristic on our list, recognition by a specific Cistercian monastery, does not seem to be open to interpretation. Either a Lay Cistercian community is recognized by the monastery with which it is associated or it is not. The only question here is the form that recognition might take. The *Identity* document puts it this way: "For all the groups, it is the monastic community represented by the Abbot (Abbess) that recognizes in them the charism and confers on them their membership in the Cistercian family, according to the nature of the bonds that unite them." For some groups, this takes the form of a verbal recognition conveyed by the Abbott, for others an implied recognition by the assignment of a monastic liaison, and for some it takes the form of a letter from the Abbot/Abbess and/or his/her Council.

.....Now I would like to move on to the second goal of our meeting here this week.

#### **Reflect on and share what formation means for Lay Cistercians**

In 2008, *A Survey Relative to the Formation and Transformation of Persons in the Cistercian Charism* was distributed to all the Lay Cistercian communities and summaries from each of the three language groups were published on the ILC web site in 2009.

Once again, it is important to understand what the terms used here mean. As the title of the survey indicates, the words *formation* and *transformation* are seen as synonymous. A short description of *formation* can be found in the Order's *Ratio Institutionis* (approved by the General Chapters in 1990):

*It is essentially by living out the various aspects of Cistercian conversatio that a person gradually becomes ever more truly a Cistercian. The [monastic] community is the ambience where the transforming action of the Spirit of God takes place. Through the daily practice of the monastic disciplines and under the pastoral care of the superior and those who share in the superior's ministry, this conversatio provides the means for personal and communal growth. (Ratio 6)*

Formation, or transformation, in the Cistercian Charism is not a course of study and it is not the completion of an orientation of three or five year's duration. It is rather the daily and personal lifelong journey one makes "*called to follow Christ along the way marked out by the Gospel, as interpreted by the Rule of St. Benedict and the tradition of Cîteaux*" (Ratio 1).

Nonetheless, individual groups (and monasteries) assist their members along this path of transformation by providing a variety of resources—such as introduction to basic Cistercian values and practices, reading from the Cistercian Fathers, articles and books about the Charism, presentations, courses of study, etc.

It is important that we remember that, when we use these words *formation* and *transformation*, we do not use them to refer to both the end goal (union with God) and to some of the means we use to reach that goal. In our discussions this week, I suggest that we use the words *Formation* and *Transformation* to refer to that lifelong journey we have all undertaken, and use the phrase *formation program* to refer to the variety of resources groups may draw upon to assist their members in achieving that goal.

In Sister Gail's presentation yesterday, she mentioned a misgiving that some monks and nuns share: *Because there is no standard formation program in place, it is left up to the individual groups. Can formation and ongoing development happen in that case?*

It seems apparent that one of the challenges that face us this week and in the future is the issue of formation of laymen and women in the Cistercian Charism. In order to live the Cistercian Charism in our lives as laymen and women, we must first of all have access to that Charism—and the only way to have access to that Charism is through a Cistercian monastery. In fact, when seen in this way, formation is one important aspect of the relationship that associates have with their monastery.

And so, what did you tell us about Formation? Forty groups responded to the survey on Formation. Some general observations can be made:

- 1) Groups range from large (the largest with 66 members) to very small (the smallest with 5 members).
- 2) Larger groups tend to be older—the oldest group is over 35 years old and the youngest less than a year.
- 3) There is discrepancy among the groups with regard to formation programs. Some groups have a well-structured and formal formation program, whereas others have no formation program at all.
- 4) Nonetheless, the majority of groups indicated that a formation program is very important for the members of your groups.

Given Sister Gail's remarks and these findings, I would like to add one last item to our list of characteristics of a community associated with a monastery—namely, the place of Formation or Transformation, that is, *conversatio morem*, in the life of the associate community.

“Close” Relationship

- Some meet regularly at a monastery
- Some have an appointed liaison from the monastery who meets with the group's leadership
- Some receive guidance and instruction in the Cistercian charism from monks/nuns
- Some have received official recognition from their monastery
- **Some have a formal, structured formation program**

“Loose” Relationship

- Some meet occasionally or only once a year at a monastery
- Some have no monastic input to their group's leadership
- Some receive no guidance or instruction directly from monks/nuns
- Some have not received any recognition from their monastery
- **Some have an informal and unstructured formation program**

The following conclusions seem logical, even though they suggest that we, as an Association, have some problems relating to formation programs, especially formation programs for small groups, new groups, and groups that exist a great distance from the monastery with which they are associated:

1. The greater the distance a group is from its monastery or the fewer times it meets at the monastery, the weaker its formation program is likely to be.
2. The larger the monastery and the greater the monastery's commitment to the lay community, the stronger the group's formation program is likely to be.
3. Therefore, the strongest formation programs are likely to be found in groups that have regular contact with a monastery, a monastery that is able to commit resources to the lay community's development.

Later this week, we will come back to a discussion of formation programs. Br. Pierre Andre will give a talk on “Formation: what it is and what it is not”. His talk will focus on formation for Cistercian associates with an emphasis on the *Ratio Institutionis* and the Cistercian tradition. That talk will help guide our discussions for the rest of the week.

However, a note of consideration: although the *Ratio* was approved by the General Chapters in 1990, we should not assume that it has been regularly and evenly adopted throughout the Order. Some of the problems that have arisen are 1) some monasteries are too small or lack resources to implement a formation program, 2) cultural differences make it extremely difficult to agree upon any one formation program that will be valuable for all monasteries, and 3) finding resources that will be of use to all, even within a single region, is very difficult. I mention this because I want you all to know right from the beginning the Spirit has not given us an easy task. I am sure we will not be able to bring our discussion to a conclusion this week. However, perhaps we can, in our discussions, take our first steps....