

COVENANT OF UNITY

In joyful association with the Gethsemani Abbey community we, the Lay Cistercians of Gethsemani Abbey, pledge ourselves individually and in community to devotion to Jesus Christ, the Virgin Mary, the Rule of Benedict, the life of prayer and work as maintained by the Cistercian charism. We pledge constant effort to conform our lives toward love of God and our brothers and sisters. To effect this devotion, our local communities and the members thereof affirm, adopt, and dutifully implement the following Covenant of Unity.

With the Gethsemani Conventual Community:

1. LCG is privileged to be recognized by the Conventual Chapter of Gethsemani (vote 3/18/12) and affirms its great responsibility to respect the monastic enclosure and Cistercian charism.

Local Community Guidelines:

1. The local communities of Lay Cistercians of Gethsemani Abbey are: Caritas, Chicago, Cincinnati, Cleveland, Columbus, Indiana, Kentucky, Michigan, Tennessee (Memphis and Nashville), and Spiritus (an on-line community).

2. We confirm that a local LCG community preferably should meet at least eight times a year.

3. Local communities should maintain a minimum of 3 members.

4. Community leadership should be selected within the community. The community leaders must be LCG Committed Members. Their main responsibilities are to coordinate/facilitate the local LCG meetings. In most cases, the community leaders serve on the LCG Advisory Council.

5. Each Community must maintain liaison and participation in the wider community of LCG with no more than two representatives on the LCG Advisory Council.

6. Annually, each local community will submit a House Report to the LCG Advisory Council to assess the health, goals, programs and spiritual devotion of each local community and its members, and to ensure that each local community understands its obligations as a member of the LCG family and is striving to meet those obligations. To foster a spirit of common devotion to the goals of LCG, the spirit of Gethsemani Abbey, and the Cistercian charism, and to encourage ongoing self-assessment and sharing of best practices, the House Reports will be shared with all local communities.

7. Should a community be unable to maintain these guidelines, the community will be offered a period of discernment during which concerted effort and support will be offered by LCG and the constituent communities to address opportunities for improvement.

8. If a local community, after a discernment period of at least three years, is unable to revive and maintain local community standards as in number 2 and 3 above, the community shall no longer be recognized as an LCG local community, and existing members thereof shall have the option to become an Affiliate member or join another existing LCG group.

9. All who are attached to LCG shall be aware of and affirm our common heritage and specifically the elements common to lay Cistercians developed in the attached Identity document.

10. We recognize a calling by laypeople seeking a close relationship with the Cistercian charism as lived at Gethsemani Abbey and by LCG sisters and brothers. In response, our local communities welcome inquiries and, as appropriate, facilitate the creation and nourishment of new communities that may be some distance from the existing community.

Membership Guidelines:

LCG recognizes five degrees of attachment: Inquirer, Candidate in Formation, Committed Member, Affiliate Member, and Friend of LCG.

1. Inquirer

A person who has heard about LCG and has made an initial contact with a local community directly, or, made an indirect contact through the LCG website. If the initial contact was made through the website, the LCG Secretary has referred the person to a local community. The person is interested in learning more about LCG, but is not necessarily sure if he or she is interested in becoming a committed member. The person may have attended some meetings at the invitation of the local community, but no mentor has been assigned.

2. Candidate in Formation

A person who has completed the LCG "Application for Candidates," has been accepted for formation by the local community, has been assigned a mentor, and has begun the process of formation, as outlined in The LCG Formation Guide. The process of formation typically takes 2 years, but may take longer, depending on the needs of the candidate. Throughout the 2 years or more of formation, the candidate evaluates a sense of being invited by the Holy Spirit to participate in the gift of the Cistercian spiritual tradition as a lay person.

Note: A person may not become a member of LCG if they are currently a member of any other Lay Associate Program (such as Benedictine oblate, Third Order Franciscan, Carmelite, or another Lay Cistercian community from another Abbey). These persons, however, may become Friends of LCG (see that section). If such a person determines that they would like to choose to end their membership in the other Lay Associate Program and pursue membership with the Lay Cistercians, they may do so.

In the special case of a Lay Cistercian from another Abbey whose monastery has closed, membership in the LCG would likely be an appropriate option. The person's individual circumstances would be reviewed to see which LCG Attachment Type would be the best assignment.

3. Committed Member

A person who has completed the formation process with a mentor, and, at the recommendation of the mentor, has been approved by the local community as ready to make a formal commitment as a Lay Cistercian of Gethsemani. The formal commitment ceremony is usually conducted during an LCG retreat at the Abbey of Gethsemani during a solemn vespers service with the monks.

Note: At the request of the local LCG Community, in the case of extreme hardship (such as health problems or living a great distance from the Abbey), the Advisory Council may grant an exception to the requirement that the Candidate be present at the Abbey for the commitment ceremony. In these cases, the commitment ceremony may be conducted by the local LCG Community.

A Committed Member is expected to make sincere efforts to practice Cistercian values and practices in the context of his or her life, as outlined in the LCG Plan of Life. One is also expected to engage in ongoing formation, to participate in the community life of the local in-person or online LCG community, and to support the overall LCG Community and the monastic community of the Abbey of Gethsemani in prayer and actions.

If possible, a committed member of LCG is expected to attend an LCG retreat at the Abbey of Gethsemani once every 2 years.

Special

.0Note #1: Diocesan priests or ministers of other Christian denominations may become Committed Members.

Special Note #2: Priests from religious orders that have their own charism, such as the Jesuits or Franciscans, however, may not become Committed Members. This is the same exclusion as for lay persons associated with charisms such as Benedictine oblates or lay Franciscans. These priests may become Friends of LCG.

4. Affiliate Member

A person who was a Committed Member, but who at some point became unable to maintain a connection to their Local Community due to health, geography, or some other reason that prevents him or her from actively participating in the life of their community. The change in the person's attachment type to Affiliate Member is by the decision of their Local Community. Affiliate status affirms a person's continuing and devoted filiation with the LCG, but recognizes that due to personal circumstances, full membership participation is unattainable. The local community will review the status of their Affiliate Members annually and affirm or change their attachment type as needed.

Affiliate Members may register for and attend LCG retreats at the Abbey if there are rooms available after all other actively participating LCG persons have been accommodated.

5. Friend of LCG

A person who is interested in and supportive of the Lay Cistercians of Gethsemani, but who is unable (see Notes below) or unwilling to become a committed member. LCG actively encourages people to be Friends of LCG, who, by their interest and support, affirm their dedication to and prayers for LCG.

Note #1: A lay person may not become a member of LCG if they are currently a member of any other Lay Associate Program (such as Benedictine oblate, Third Order Franciscan, Carmelite, or another Lay Cistercian community from another Abbey). These persons, however, may become Friends of LCG. (See the Candidate in Formation section also.)

Note #2: Priests from religious orders that have their own charism, such as the Jesuits or Franciscans, may not become Committed Members. This is the same exclusion as for lay persons associated with charisms such as Benedictine oblates or lay Franciscans. These priests may become Friends of LCG.

Friends of LCG who are active participants in the meetings and activities of a Local Community are eligible to register for and attend the LCG retreats at the Abbey.

Advisory Council:

1. The LCG Advisory Council is composed of representatives of the recognized local communities and consistent with the adopted bylaws of the Council.

2. The Advisory Council affirms and maintains close relationship with Gethsemani and the Abbot's appointed representatives. The Council shall keep Gethsemani liaisons informed of local community developments and, in conjunction therewith, develop programs and guidelines to affect the quality and constancy demanded by our dedication to the Rule of Benedict, the Abbot of Gethsemani and the coenobitic community, the International Association of Lay Cistercian Communities, and the guidance and spirit offered by the OCSO.

3. Paramount among projects is attention to the formation of members. The Council shall develop and consistently evaluate the ongoing formation of candidates for membership, provide materials and programs for continuing formation of members, and shall make effort to provide for the wider community the materials to enable others to taste and savor the joys and advantages of the Cistercian charism.

4. Local communities are authorized and affirmed by the Advisory Council. Such communities shall conform to Guidelines approved by the Council.

5. Recognizing the advances of electronic communication, the Council shall consciously and consistently be attuned to methods whereby a wider community of those devoted to the charism may access and progress in their spiritual journey through these means.

6. To assure consistent and devoted attention to formation and mentoring, the Council shall implement a program to guide mentoring and formation of LCG members. It is suggested that implementation shall include periodic training of mentor-leaders at Gethsemani Abbey.

Covenant April 13, 2013

Amended/Adopted April 17, 2016

Amended/Adopted April 27, 2019

Amended/Adopted December 7, 2024