



# International Association of Lay Cistercian Communities

OCSO General Chapter – Assisi 2022

Dear abbots and abbesses, dear Abbot General, thank you for allowing us to be here and sharing your time with us. Although our time with you is brief, we know that it is significant when we are included in the busy schedule of a General Chapter. It has great value for us as it confirms that Cistercian lay people are part of the great Cistercian Family.

Cistercian laity have been invited to the OCSO General Chapter since 2002 so it is already 20 years since the General Chapter first recognized our lay vocation and spiritual journey as indivisibly united to the Cistercian charism.

In these early years, we have slowly built a foundation for the lay Cistercians and international association. With our member communities we drafted a series of documents, some to better understand the call that we have received from God, others to build and organize our International Association of Lay Cistercian Communities (IALCC). Our inspiration has always been Cistercian history.

Like you we experienced COVID with cancellations and lockdown. We were unable to hold our 2020 international meeting at Benedictine University in Chicago. Each language commission did hold two regional meetings in 2022, however. Our focus at these meetings was synodality.

Finally, we held a brief international meeting with just two delegates from each language commission earlier this week in Assisi. We adopted a new document on which we had begun work in 2018: *Bringing the Cistercian Charism to the World*. This document has been provided to you so that you may have the opportunity to read it.

We recognize how important synodality is within our Cistercian Order. It is a foundation of the Rule of St. Benedict and the Charter of Charity. It is important too that we have the feeling that our individual lay communities are family with all the other lay Cistercian communities. Do we dream together? Do we walk together? While our language commissions had fruitful discussions on synodality, we realize that many member communities do not feel connected to the IALCC.

Over the next three years we will ask our member communities to look “inward” and reflect on how we can put into practice synodality within the lay Cistercian family, to apply it to ourselves. While communities are associated with specific monasteries, they also exist within their language commission and at the international level. How can we dream together? How can we grow together at each of these levels?

Learning to listen is a way of self-knowledge. We will listen to the dreams of our lay Cistercian family as well as those of the monastic family. We will ask each community to speak out, to share specific ideas as to how we can strengthen our bonds. For example, one community has studied the Charter of Charity and proposes that we explore the possibility of “Charity visits” between and among lay communities. All member communities share the responsibility to strengthen our bonds and we hope to tell you in three years the steps that we have taken.

The association represents 45 communities around the world, associated with monasteries belonging to four branches of the Cistercian Family: OCSO, OCist, Congregation of St. Bernard and Bernardines d'Esquermes.

We are aware that our vocation is linked to the monasteries to which we are associated. Without the support, the recognition, the teachings, the acceptance. . . in short, without the generosity of the monastic communities that welcome us, our vocation would not be feasible.

As part of the Cistercian family, we feel pain at the closure of a monastery. When a lay Cistercian community is associated with a monastery, any loss of a link between the lay and monastic community affects all of us. We feel it is important to apply synodality to such “orphaned” lay Cistercian member communities. This will require creativity to ensure that such communities do not disappear from our Cistercian family but can continue to live their lay Cistercian vocation.

We continue to build this new expression of the Cistercian charism. The present in which we live and the future we envision are challenging at all levels, full of trials in which we must face complex situations. We are realistic and also full of hope, because we trust God who in every moment of the history of humanity has been the one who has led the initiative showing the way forward.

We list at the end of this report the adopted documents we have generated over the years. In each of our visits to the General Chapter we have shared these documents with all of you and you can find them at [www.cistercianfamily.org](http://www.cistercianfamily.org). They are the best way to describe our evolution which has brought us to where we are today.

As always, we thank Dom Armand for his invaluable help. His guidance (and great sense of humour) continues to illuminate our path.

We cannot end without asking you to keep us in your prayers. We need all possible help so that the lay Cistercians know how to bring to this world a determined and courageous Christian witness based on the values proper to our charism.

We will be glad to answer any questions.

Many thanks,  
*Tina, Jacques & Teresa*

Spiritual Documents:

- Bringing the Cistercian Charism to the World (2022)
- Lay Cistercian Community “Look How They Love One Another” (2017)
- The Lay Cistercian Spiritual Journey (2014)
- Declaration on Formation (2014)
- Characteristics of Lay Cistercian Communities (2011)
- Lay Cistercian Identity (2008)

Organizational Documents:

- Statutes of the Association (2017)
- Bonds of Charity (2008 ad experimentum; 2011 ratified)

How we define synodality:

