

**INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF LAY CISTERCIAN COMMUNITIES**  
**House Report**

1) **Name of lay community:** Associates of Assumption Abbey, Ava, MO.

2) **Contact person:** Loretta Sellers

3) **Date group was established:** Initial group was established in St. Louis, MO in 1995. Since 2006 three additional chapters have formed in rural parts of the state. We consider ourselves one group which has one Constitution. We are like spokes on a wheel, separated at the rim by distance from each other but close together at the hub which is the Monastery at Ava.

4) **Number of members:** Total number at this time (three members have died this past year) is 18. St. Louis has 8; Cuba,6; Springfield 2; West Plains has 2 but meets regularly with 8 others for Scripture Study. These 8 do not wish to be associates but they visit the Abbey and are considered Friends of Assumption Abbey.

5) **Monastic liaison(s):** Father Paul Jones, retired diocesan priest and long time Family Brother of Assumption Abbey. Our acting abbot or superior ad nutum is Father Alberic Maisog.

6) **Date of adoption of the Lay Cistercian identity document:** Signed on 2/2/12 by Father Cyprian Harrison, superior ad nutum at that time. However, recognition and encouragement was formally expressed ten years prior by a letter to the Associates of Assumption Abbey from Abbot Mark Scott. This beautiful letter, dated November 2002, can be found among the documents posted on the International web site.

7) **Charter and Statutes** - The Charter was finalized in August of 2004. No statutes, as such. In our desire not to "play at being monks" we do not wish to impose a quasi-religious rule on anyone. Each individual has a personal rule which will be discussed in section 9 below.

8) **Leadership Council** - We have no formal council and no elections. Each chapter has a leader, usually the founder of that group. There is one corresponding secretary who keeps the lay group and the monastic community in touch with each other on a regular basis. The liaison, Father Paul, reports monthly to the lay chapters concerning happenings at the abbey and we keep him up to date on our doings. The contact person for the International Associates sees that copies of all documents received are passed on to the abbot, the liaison and to the different chapters.

9) **Formation program** - One of our lay members has, over the last three years, composed 36 talks which endeavor to convey the essence of the Cistercian charism, Cistercian and Trappist history, Cistercian practices, the Rule of St. Benedict, the liturgy and the liturgical year, our place in the Church, and the important role of Jesus and Mary. These have been made available to the four chapters and are hopefully read and pondered at the monthly meetings. All four chapters meet together at the Abbey twice a year, August and February, at which time we receive additional instruction from Father Paul. A good portion of the time is given to accountability regarding Covenant agreements. Ten years ago Father Paul introduced the concept of Covenant Associates. With his guidance, each member draws up a personal rule by which that individual hopes to incorporate into his or her daily life those aspects of the Cistercian charism that the individual may realistically expect to fulfill considering other obligations that family, work, and society demand. No one promises more than he or she can deliver. Two written copies of the individual's rule are taken to a gathering of both the monastic and lay communities in the chapel where the individuals orally promise to strive to live such rule. One copy is signed and retained by the individual; the other signed by the abbot or superior and is kept at the monastery. This is done at two six month intervals, followed by a year interval. At the end of that time it may

be extended for another year or if thought appropriate, a life-long commitment may be made. In that case the person is presented with a cross on a chain as a symbol of the commitment. These rules may be amended from time to time. Covenant Association is not imposed. It is an option that not all members have chosen. The many who have made this commitment find that it has been very helpful in sustaining spiritual growth.

Please describe your community's situation considering the characteristics described in the document generated in Dubuque on "Characteristics of Lay Cistercian Communities." (no need to answer number 1):

1. *Lay Cistercian Communities receive written recognition from the Abbot/Abbess of the monastery with which the lay community is associated.*
2. *Lay Cistercians 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.*

If your community has a Charter of Incorporation or Bylaws we ask that you send it to us. If your community has a Council, we ask that you describe its formation, membership and election system. Your answers will be posted on the website of the association and may also be consulted during the international meeting in Lourdes.

**House Report Submission Deadline: 31 December 2013**

Please send to: [thmcmahon@q.com](mailto:thmcmahon@q.com)