

INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF LAY CISTERCIAN COMMUNITIES

House Report

March 2014

1) Name of lay community: Ave Maria Lay Cistercians

2) Contact person:

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3) Date group was established: Oct 25/2009

4) Number of members: 12

5) Monastic liaison(s): Rocky S. Thomas

6) Date of adoption of the Lay Cistercian identity document: April 24/2012

7) Charter and Statutes – please see attached

8) Leadership Council – 5 members, selected by vote.

9) Formation program -

We have 2 years of formation, and then 3 years of junior program, total 5 years.

The main formation activity is a class within the monthly meeting.

The topics, (one per year) include:

Rule of St. Benedict

The Cistercian way(book)

Lay and Monastic Cistercian historical documents

Monastic practices(book)

Passing from self to God(book)

Our community has a formation program which is modeled after the program used by the Lay Cistercians of Our Lady of the Holy Spirit in Conyers, GA.

Since we are a rather young group, some adjustments were required at the beginning. For example the first council was self appointed rather than elected. Also due to the small number of members we combined certain lectures for members in the first and second year formation. But we are experiencing rapid growth; we have about 5 new members in the past year alone.

One of our challenges is the fact that our Monastery (Holy Spirit) is about 600 miles away. Most of us go to the monastery just once a year.

Starting on the following page, please find our statutes. The statutes describe our identity and characteristics, which we believe are in accordance with the identity document approved in Huerta.

Statutes of the Ave Maria Lay-Cistercians

Associated to the
Abbey of Our Lady of the Holy Spirit
Conyers, Georgia, USA

Ave Maria Cistercian Associates Suggested Guidelines 2012
Prepared by the Lay Cistercians of Ave Maria
April 15, 2012

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I. Introduction.

We appreciate the prayerful and practical work that has gone into the Statutes and Guidelines of our mother and sister lay Cistercian Communities.

Using articles from their endeavors, yet recognizing our Cistercian Associate Community is only three years old with the first members eligible for first promises this year, our original guidelines will be simple.

II. Historical background.

In September 2009, Juan and Olga Henao, who had spent a number of days at Holy Spirit Monastery, asked a Lay Cistercian of South Florida who had recently moved to Ave Maria if a Lay Cistercian Association could be started in Ave Maria.

On October 26, the Henaos and Connie and Stephen Decker met at Ann Brefka's home with Sister Lillian Shank, OCSO, and Rev. Robert Tatman, Pastor of Ave Maria Oratory and a former Trappist.

Sister Lillian introduced the background and charism of the Order of Cistercians of the Strict Observance.

Orientation sessions continued. In April 2010, the Henaos asked Father Abbott Francis Michael, OCSO to be admitted into the formation program of the Ave Maria Lay Cistercian Associates under the auspices of the Monastery of the Holy Spirit and our Lady of the Holy Spirit Lay Cistercians.

III. Cistercian values.

As catholic lay men and women, married and single, we recognize a personal call by the Spirit of God to love and live for God in the special charism of Order of Cistercian Strict Observance under the Rule of Saint Benedict. "Ora at labora ", fits our various lifestyles. While Trappists monks and nuns live in monasteries distanced from the secular world to dedicate their lives in silence and humility for the salvation of the world with Jesus our Redeemer, we lay Cistercians try to live the Gospel through the Trappist charism in the monastery of our hearts.

- A. In this Benedict Trappist spirit, we practice meditation and contemplation and seek in our homes and surroundings simplicity and peace through humility and hospitality
- B. To love God with our whole being in union with Jesus for the salvation of the whole world, we practice the following:
 - Daily mass when possible.
 - Lauds and Vespers in union with our Cistercian family.
 - Lectio Divina as Holy Scripture is our foundation.
 - As Blessed Mother is Queen of our hearts and homes, we pray daily rosary.
 - Once a month, we meet in community to strengthen our fervor and commitment.
 - A yearly retreat at our Monastery Our Lady of the Holy Spirit during which requests to enter formation and first and subsequent promises are made to Fr. Abbot or his designated appointee.

IV. Organization and Affiliation.

We hold a bond of unity and charity under and with the monks of the Monastery of the Holy Spirit and with the Lay Cistercians of Our Lady of the Holy Spirit.

We have requested affiliation with the International Association of Lay Cistercian Communities. As lay people who are called to an intimate contemplative relationship with our God, we unlike monastics, live in a secular community, community of our spouses, children, and others. Thus our love and care, our work, and prayer play out in our domestic community; here we can practice in fidelity a silence whereby we “hear with our hearts” our family. Here we can practice humility and obedience in lovingly carrying out our responsibilities.

As at this time, we are only four persons in promises (all transplants from Our Lady of the Sacred Heart Community) and two persons of Ave Maria who are eligible to make first promises in April 2012.

We do not see a need to elect a Council at this time.

Those in promises together make joint decisions.

V. Formation.

A. Inquiries.

A member in promises is responsible for holding inquiry sessions for people interested in the lay Cistercian charism. Monthly classes are held from September/October until the annual retreat in April.

The sessions cover the five following topics:

- a. History and Spirituality of Cistercian/Trappist Life Introduce Founders- Robert, Alberic and Stephen and Cistercian evangelists.
- b. Introduction to the Rule of St. Benedict.
- c. Lay Cistercian history.
- d. Basic Cistercian values using the Rule, Constitutions, our Statutes/Guidelines.
- e. Liturgy/Review Early Documents; General review with discussion.

B. Formation.

A senior member is responsible for two years of Formation Program for persons who have asked for and been accepted by the Council to enter the Formation Program. The syllabus follows Holy Spirit's.

C. Juniorate.

Having completed the two years of The Formation Program, candidates may ask, first- the Ave Maria Community and second- Fr. Abbot of Holy Spirit to make a one year commitment as Ave Maria Lay Cistercian. This may be repeated at least two times when the Associate may wish to make a life time commitment.

During these three years the Lay Cistercian becomes more familiar with Trappist (Benedictine) Charism.

VI. Other.

- a. As members of the lay Cistercian family, we believe special prayers are called for upon the death of an associate, their spouse, child or parent. The seven penitential psalms or similar prayers should be offered for eight days for the repose of the soul.
- b. While no monetary fee is levied each professed is asked to contribute monthly or yearly to assist in funding the International conference.
- c. These statutes can be changed after discussion by a 75% vote of member in promises.