

2013 HOUSE REPORT FOR THE CISTERCIAN LAY CONTEMPLATIVES OF SPENCER, MA

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Current Number of Members: 9 Full Members plus 3 Candidates in Formation

Date of CLC Spencer Establishment: June 2000

Monastic Liaisons

Since its founding in June 2000, the CLC of Spencer has been assisted by a monastic liaison from Our Lady of St. Joseph's Abbey of Spencer, Massachusetts. Our founding monastic liaison was Father Peter Schmidt, who served the Spencer CLC from June 2000 until December 2005. Brother Emmanuel Morelli served as our liaison from January 2006 through March 2007. Since April 2007, until this month (December 2013), we have been blessed with Father Francis Rodriguez as our monastic liaison. Just prior to the writing of this house report, Father Rodriguez suddenly announced that he is no longer able to serve as our monastic liaison due to his failing health. Father Abbot Damian Carr has appointed Father Matthew Flynn as our new monastic liaison, effective January 2014.

Lay Cistercian Identity Document

The newly elected leadership council of the CLC of Spencer became aware of the Lay Cistercian Identity document approved in Huerta in 2008 at the International Lay Cistercian encounter at Dubuque, Iowa in May 2011. It was enthusiastically embraced by the leadership council and subsequently by the entire CLC of Spencer community. Upon the recommendation of the International Lay Cistercian Association, as specified in the **Characteristics of Lay Cistercian Communities** generated from the Iowa meeting, the CLC of Spencer formally recognized and adopted the Lay Cistercian Identity document in the fall of 2011 via unanimous approval by CLC of Spencer members. This adoption and recognition was formally acknowledged in the March 2012 revised edition of the Charter and Statutes of the Cistercian Lay Contemplative Community of Spencer, MA (see below).

Charter and Statutes

The original Charter and Statutes of the Spencer CLC community were reviewed and studied by the Spencer CLC community during the fall of 2011 and early winter of 2012. Based upon feedback received by Spencer CLC members and our monastic liaison, the leadership council revised the original Spencer CLC Charter and Statutes and presented it to the larger CLC community for a vote. The Charter and Statutes were unanimously approved by CLC Spencer members and formally adopted in March 2012. (Please see attached copy of the full Charter and Statutes of the CLC Spencer community).

Leadership Council

The Lay Cistercian community of Spencer has had a leadership council structure in place since the group's inception in June 2000. The current leadership council has been in place since 2011 via election by the CLC community. There are currently two lay members on the council whose primary responsibility is to assist the administration, guidance, formation, and development of the lay community. The leadership council works closely with the monastic liaison and meets with him on a monthly basis. The Spencer CLC is planning on soliciting nominations and voting for a new leadership council in 2014. (Please see CLC

Governance, Formation and Function of the Lay Council, and Lay Council Service and Member Qualifications in the Spencer CLC Charter and Statutes document for details regarding formation, membership, and election system).

Formation Program

In the spirit of the 2011 ILC encounter in Iowa, the Spencer CLC has made a considerable effort to develop and foster a curriculum of topics and focused discussions designed to facilitate ongoing and deepening formation of all CLC members. This process has occurred in close collaboration with our monastic liaison Father Rodriguez, soliciting his input, wisdom and guidance. During the past two and a half years the Spencer CLC has studied, discussed and reflected upon several of St. Bernard of Clairvaux's *Sermons on the Song of Songs*, as well as his *Homilies on the Blessed Virgin Mary*. Our CLC has spent several groups re-examining the CLC Plan of Life in all of its facets. Individual CLC members have come forth to lead discussions on various aspects of the Plan of Life, including those that are most challenging. This has afforded an opportunity for members to share the joys and challenges of living the Cistercian charism in the world within the broader group and to solicit helpful and respectful feedback and spiritual support from group members on areas that are challenging or seem "stuck". Father Rodriguez has led us in discussions and reflections on monastic practices, most notably Lectio Divina. His profound passion for Lectio Divina and his patience with our "stumbling" has deepened our practice of Lectio considerably. We are also currently reading and discussing Michael Casey's book, *Sacred Reading: The Ancient Art of Lectio Divina*. Lastly, we have spent some group time focusing on how we, as Lay Cistercians, live out and experience several of the concepts put forth in the Lay Cistercian Identity document such as "continuous conversion", "liberation and internal conversion" and "desire for incarnation".

We believe strongly that formation is an ongoing, never ending process, and that we will never exhaust this topic. Formation topics we are considering as we begin a new year include broader exposure to the spiritual writings of Cistercian fathers and mothers, the wisdom writings of the desert fathers and mothers, and deeper exploration and commentary on the Rule of Benedict.