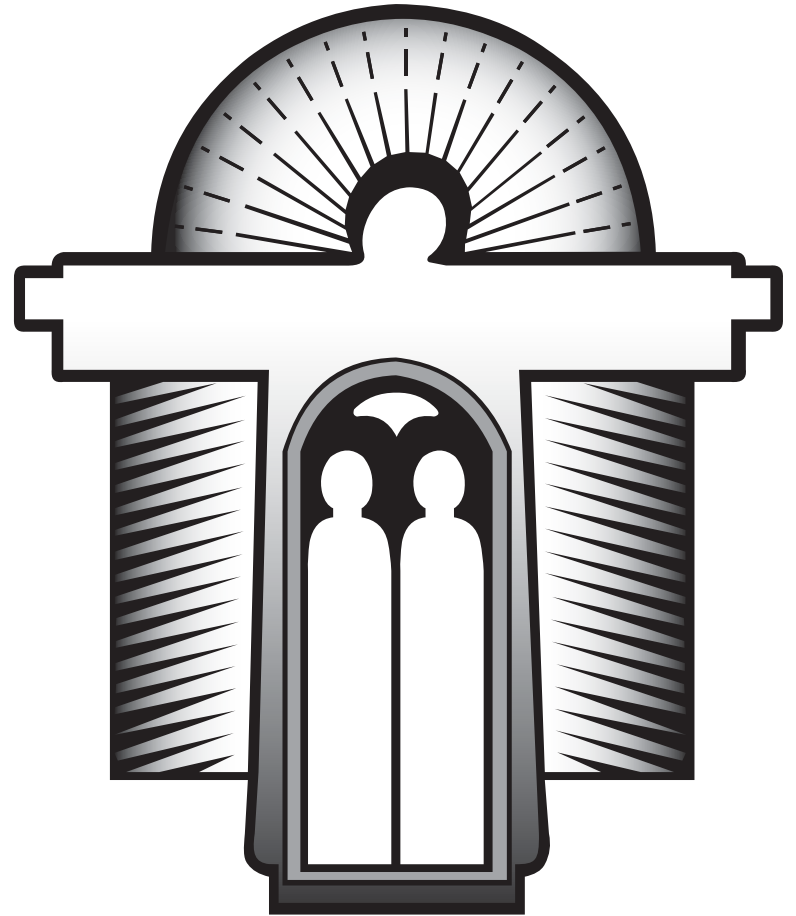


Constitutions and Guidelines of
The Associates
of the
Iowa Cistercians



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2010



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The Constitutions of the Associates of the Iowa Cistercians

1. Preface

- 1.1. A Lay Cistercian is a Christian who feels a calling from God to lead a contemplative and spiritual life in the world, a life modeled on the wisdom of Cistercian values and practices, and who seeks a community of like-minded people. The Associates of the Iowa Cistercians (AIC) meets at New Melleray and Our Lady of the Mississippi Abbeys where the monks and nuns from both monasteries provide assistance in instruction, formation and support.
- 1.2. The Constitutions of the Iowa Cistercians follows closely the Constitutions and Statutes of the Cistercian Order. The major differences are found in 1) that the community of the AIC is not cenobitic, 2) that Lay Cistercians seek to live their calling in the midst of the world, 3) that Lay Cistercians do not take vows, and 4) that the monasteries do not have any direct juridical administration or oversight of the Association.

2. Cistercian Patrimony

- 2.1. The AIC is a community of people living in the world who order their lives towards contemplation and transformation in the image of God. They dedicate themselves to the worship of God within the world. There they strive to lead a life of prayer by following the Rule of Saint Benedict in order to apply Christ's message of love and service. Attentive to God's Word and responsive to the Holy Spirit, they strive to practice self-denial in following Christ.

2.2. Living in the world and following in the footsteps of the Cistercians of the Strict Observance, members of the AIC aspire to that interior quiet in which wisdom is born. Through humility and obedience they struggle against pride and sin. In simplicity and labor they seek solidarity with the poor. In hospitality they share the peace and hope which Christ has freely given.

3. The Cistercian Way of Life

3.1. The purpose of the AIC is to bring Associates into ever-closer union with Christ since it is only through the experience of personal love for Jesus Christ that the particular gifts of the Cistercian vocation can flower. The following are the essential elements of living the Cistercian Charism in the world.

3.1.1. Asceticism

Following the example of the Fathers of Citeaux, who sought an uncomplicated relationship with God, Lay Cistercians are urged to practice renunciation of worldly pursuits in a way that is consistent with their personal and family responsibilities. This can include almsgiving, fasting, reduction of material wants and desires, and similar acts of restraint and self-control.

3.1.2. Community

Through their active participation in the AIC Community members assist one another to assimilate essential elements of the Cistercian way of life in order to be responsive to the grace of their vocation.

3.1.3. Contemplation

By cultivating an interior life, Lay Cistercians strive to remain mindful of the presence of God in all aspects

of their lives. To the greatest extent possible, they are encouraged to find opportunities to devote themselves frequently to prayer, reading and reflection.

3.1.4. Conversion

Through *conversatio morum*, Lay Cistercians make a commitment to live a lifestyle that is shaped by Cistercian values and practices. With the Gospel as their guide and the Rule of St. Benedict to direct them, they endeavor to behave and act on a daily basis in accord with the teachings and example of Jesus Christ.

3.1.5. Discernment and Commitment

By discerning their vocation in the world and making a personal commitment, Lay Cistercians unite with other members of the AIC, as well as with the monks and nuns of New Melleray and Our Lady of the Mississippi Abbeys, in striving to be faithful to the Cistercian way of life as expressed in relationships, community, prayer, work and a disciplined life.

3.1.6. Divine Office

For Cistercian monks and nuns, nothing is to be preferred to the Work of God. While the daily schedules of most Lay Cistercians preclude participation in the entire Liturgy of the Hours, they are urged to incorporate one or more of the hours into their daily life so that each may participate in the Church's official prayer of praise and intercession.

3.1.7. Enclosure

For Lay Cistercians who do not live within the confines of a monastery, enclosure relates to the

practice of guarding one's heart by avoiding choices and behaviors that are contrary to the Gospel. This requires a conscious decision to choose to live in a way that is consistent with their Christian calling.

3.1.8. **Formation**

Lay Cistercians participate in a structured formation process during which time they are provided with information about Cistercian values and practices, and are supported in their efforts to apply these to their lives. The teaching and example of the monks and nuns, the experience and wisdom of committed members, and the constant help of the community as a whole are of great value to individuals as they pass through the initial formation period and continue their on-going spiritual journey. (See below.)

3.1.9. **Humility**

"Far from being demeaning or dehumanizing, true humility is a quality that enhances human behavior and spiritual endeavor" (Michael Casey). Striving to come to an honest view and appraisal of themselves enables Lay Cistercians to recognize that their fundamental relationship to God is one of dependence and trust, and helps them respond with love and respect to the needs of others.

3.1.10. **Imitation of Christ**

With Christ as the Divine Model, the soul of the Christian is instructed in the way of love. This is the core of the Cistercian life and towards which the School of Charity is oriented. For this reason Lay Cistercians are encouraged to model their lifestyles

on Christ using the examples and insights of the Cistercian Charism.

3.1.11. **Lectio/Scripture**

This monastic practice, by which God's Word is heard and pondered, is a source of prayer and contemplation for men and women living in the world. By taking the time to learn and be faithful to the practice of *lectio divina*, Lay Cistercians come to a deeper awareness of how the Word of God is bearing fruit in their lives.

3.1.12. **Obedience**

Through obedience Lay Cistercians attempt to live their lives under the guidance of the Rule of Saint Benedict in service to one another and the community as a whole. In this renouncing of will, they follow the example of Christ and commit themselves to the school of the Lord's service.

3.1.13. **Prayer**

Lay Cistercians seek continually deepening communion with God through attentiveness of heart and solitary prayer in order to foster mindfulness of the transcendent nature of life, and be open to the inspirations of the Holy Spirit. In addition to praying together as a community at monthly meetings, Lay Cistercians undertake to spend time every day in personal prayer.

3.1.14. **Psalms**

The Church has always considered the Psalms her most perfect book of prayer and for this reason they are the basis for the Liturgy of the Hours. "In the

Psalms, we drink divine praise at its pure and stainless source" (Thomas Merton). Because these beautiful prayers speak directly to the human heart, Lay Cistercians are encouraged to make them an integral part of their daily prayer lives.

3.1.15. **Silence and Solitude**

Silence is counted among the principal monastic values of the Cistercian Order. It assures solitude, fosters mindfulness of God and community, opens the mind to the inspirations of the Holy Spirit, and encourages attentiveness of heart and solitary prayer to God. Although finding moments of silence in one's daily life may be difficult, Lay Cistercians are urged to create some time each day for silent prayer and awareness of God.

3.1.16. **Simplicity and Poverty**

Following the example of the Fathers of Citeaux, who sought an uncomplicated relationship with God, Lay Cistercians are urged to foster a personal lifestyle of simplicity in a manner that is consistent with their personal and family responsibilities.

3.1.17. **Stability**

Lay Cistercians trust in the providence of God who has called them to this community and this group of people. Without regular and active participation in monthly AIC meetings, it is impossible to be a member of the community. In this sense, faithful participation in the AIC is a type of stability not unlike the stability of the monks and nuns within the monastery.

3.1.18. **Work as prayer**

Labora (work), which has always enjoyed special esteem in the Cistercian tradition, can be an important element in the spiritual life as well as an essential ingredient in health of mind and body. For this reason, Lay Cistercians are urged to seek a healthy and prayerful balance between the work they do and the other aspects of their lives. Occasionally, the AIC community as a whole will contribute a day of manual labor to the monasteries.

3.1.19. **Cistercian History and Documents**

A basic knowledge of the history of the Cistercian Order enables Lay Cistercians to deepen their understanding of how the charism has taken shape over the years. Through the ages the Church has been enriched by the insights of Cistercian writers, including Bernard of Clairvaux, William of St. Thierry, Aelred of Rievaulx, Gertrude of Helfta, and Mechtild of Magdeburg, to name a few.

3.1.20. **Rule of St. Benedict**

Written in the 6th Century, the Rule of St. Benedict, or RB, as it is often referred to, has an importance second only to scripture in the lives of Cistercian monks and nuns in ordering and guiding their communal and individual lives. Because the RB speaks to non-monastic men and women as well, it is important for Lay Cistercians to learn how to apply what is found there to their own lives outside the monastery.

4. Life of the Community

- 4.1. Lay Cistercians seek unity of spirit in the love of God through the up-building of the AIC community. The preservation of unity among members of the community depends on a sincere and mutual effort to respond to one another's needs on a regular basis.
- 4.2. Associates have the right and duty to participate fully in the AIC community, although this participation can be exercised in different ways. All are called to mutual care, mutual cooperation and mutual obedience. All are to be concerned for the spiritual state of the community, which includes a willingness to respectfully share perspectives, ideas and concerns through active participation in monthly meetings. They bear one another's shortcomings with patience, serve one another humbly, and support one another by prayer and other appropriate means.
- 4.3. Associates are called to contribute to the good of the community by sharing with others the spiritual gifts each has received by God's grace. It is the responsibility of the community leaders, the monastic liaisons, and each member of the community to foster each person's gifts and intelligence so that everyone is given opportunities to contribute strengths and skills for the good of the group.
- 4.4. Although monks and nuns from New Melleray and Our Lady of the Mississippi Abbeys are integrally involved with the formation of AIC members in the Cistercian Charism and may provide service to the AIC in a variety of other ways, they are not members

of the AIC. The AIC is a separate community living and developing in association with these two Iowa Cistercian monasteries.

5. Liturgical Life

The spiritual character of the AIC is especially evident in the celebration of liturgy, whether this is performed in community or individually. The church's liturgy, as well as the liturgical aspects of monastic practices such as the Divine Office, strengthen and increase both the inner sense of one's Cistercian vocation and communion among members.

6. Celebration of the Eucharist

For members of the AIC, Eucharist is the source and summit of the Christian life and of their communion in Christ. They are encouraged to participate in the Eucharist whenever possible for it is by the sharing the paschal mystery that they are united more closely with one another and with the whole Church. However, the present discipline of the Church with regard to the sharing of Eucharistic communion limits reception of communion to Catholics and those Christian churches identified by the Code of Canon Law only.

7. Reception of Guests

Just as every Cistercian monastery welcomes guests as Christ, so also visitors to the AIC are received with reverence and kindness without allowing this service to interfere with the primary goals of the community. An annual visitor orientation day is held for those seeking information about the AIC. Membership is open to any Christian adult who feels a calling from

God to live a contemplative and transformed lifestyle in the world. Because the AIC is an ecumenical community, all members of the community are made to feel welcome during meetings or liturgical celebrations.

8. Apostolate of Associates

Although Cistercian monks and nuns cannot be called upon to meet the needs of the active apostolate, Lay Cistercians, given their life in the world, are encouraged to consider their participation in the Cistercian Charism in light of the Church as a whole and the needs of their local churches and faith communities in particular. Nonetheless, the goal of participation in the AIC is not an active apostolate, but rather the development of a contemplative and transformative life as a way of participating in the mission of Christ and his Church.

9. Leadership

The AIC community depends on a shared leadership structure in order to direct and nurture the growth of the community in prayer and charity. Types of shared leadership include the AIC Council, consultation with members in on-going formation, community dialogue, and service to the community.

9.1. AIC Council

The AIC council works with and for the members of the AIC community. Decisions are based upon the Rule of St. Benedict, the AIC Constitutions, and the AIC Guidelines. The Council meets regularly to review goals and objectives, to discuss and determine how best to meet the ongoing needs of the AIC

community, and to communicate with the Abbot of New Melleray and the Abbess of Mississippi Abbey through the AIC's monastic liaisons.

9.2. Consultation with members of On-Going formation

In keeping with the monastic leadership model which seeks input from the senior members of the community, the AIC Council depends on feedback and counsel of its senior members—those who have made their AIC commitments and are members of the on-going formation group.

9.3. Community Dialogue

All AIC members have a share in building and maintaining the AIC community. All are expected to take part in community discussions in a spirit of openness and mutual cooperation, and it is expected that questions, problems or concerns will be dealt with in a spirit of charity and mutual respect.

9.4. Service to the community

Any kind of service to others that flows from a response to the gifts of God's grace is a way of being true to the spirit of our call to the AIC. The community depends on members to assist with the various tasks that are involved in keeping the community running efficiently.

10. Formation

Formation is the process by means of which members of the community are transformed in the image of God. There is no one definitive way to provide formation for every member of the community. For each member of the community, both new members and senior members, it is

important that the focus of Formation remain on how the Cistercian Charism helps members apply Gospel values to their lives in the world in order to grow in the likeness of Christ.

10.1. The Process of Formation

The teaching and example of the monks and nuns, the experience and wisdom of committed members, and the constant help of the community as a whole are of great value to individuals as they are formed in the image of God in their on-going spiritual journey.

10.2. Admission of Members

10.2.1. Although the physical resources of the monastery which provides space for monthly meetings are limited, it is the goal of the AIC community to provide access to as many persons interested in membership as possible. Nonetheless, from time to time it may be necessary to limit membership because of space constraints and in order to avoid over-taxing the resources of the AIC.

10.2.2. When possible, the community will provide annual opportunities for inquirers to visit the monastery, participate in a monthly meeting, and receive an orientation to the AIC. They will be told about the difficulties that are to be found on the way to God with special emphasis on those of leading a Cistercian lifestyle in the world. They will be received as members if they manifest the spiritual attitude and aptitude needed for a Cistercian life in the world.

10.3. On-Going Formation

On-going Formation is available to the whole community of committed members in order to strengthen their Cistercian lifestyle in the world by drawing from the riches of biblical, patristic, liturgical, theological and spiritual resources. In addition members of on-going formation are expected to share their individual talents and abilities for the good of the AIC community as a whole.

10.4. Initial Formation

New members in the community enter a three-year initial formation period that includes teaching presentations and discussions about the essential elements of the Cistercian Way of Life. The purpose of Initial Formation is to introduce new members to the practices and values by means of which they, and the community as a whole, are transformed in the image of God. All of the community is expected to support new members by prayer and example and to encourage them to persevere. Community members may remain in initial formation for longer than three years should they or the monastic representatives believe that is the best path for them.

10.5. Commitment of Members

10.5.1. During initial formation care is taken to help new members grow spiritually through participation in the Cistercian way of life. Towards the end of the initial formation period, prospective members discern whether they are being called to a committed membership in the AIC. If they truly

seek God, are zealous in pursuing a Cistercian lifestyle outside the monastery, and are rightly suited to participate in the community relationships, they are invited to make their AIC commitment.

10.5.2. AIC members do not take vows or make binding commitments to either the AIC or New Melleray or Our Lady of the Mississippi Abbeys. However, once they have discerned the call to make a personal commitment, members create their own individual statements to reflect the spiritual practices they will undertake in order to be faithful to their calling.

11. In the Joy of the Holy Spirit

These are the Constitutions of the Associates of the Iowa Cistercians. May God grant that through the Holy Spirit, members of the community may observe them in fraternal charity and fidelity to the Church, and so joyfully make their way to the fullness of love with the help of the Blessed Virgin Mary, the Queen of Citeaux.

Membership Guidelines of the Associates of the Iowa Cistercians

Becoming a Member of the AIC

Inquiry Process

The purpose of the AIC is to encourage and assist individuals who feel called to incorporate the wisdom, insight and inspiration of Cistercian values and practices into their daily lives.

Membership is open to any Christian adult who has been drawn by the spirit to live a contemplative lifestyle in the world. Because of space limitations and in order to avoid over taxing the resources of both monastic communities, membership must be limited to sixty.

When there are places available, those who express an interest in joining the AIC will be provided with background information about our goals and objectives and asked to complete a short self-assessment questionnaire designed to help them discern whether to enter initial formation. Prospective members need to recognize that the AIC is not a support group or a prayer group but rather a community of persons interested in learning about and applying the values and practices of the Cistercian Charism as explained in the three-year Initial Formation track.

Do not grant newcomers to the monastic life an easy entry, but as the Apostle says 'Test the spirits to see if they are from God'
(RB 58:1,21, John 4:1,)

Prior to joining the AIC, prospective members need to consider:

- Whether their overall health will interfere with living a contemplative lifestyle in the world.
- Whether they have the time to give one day a month to

participate in AIC meetings, and the ability and means to travel to the monastery once a month.

- The importance of monthly attendance (with the exception of family or work obligations that occasionally occur).

AIC Orientation Meetings

Unless enrollment in the AIC has been temporarily closed due to peak capacity, an orientation day for new members is held once each year at which time they are invited to participate in an AIC meeting and attend orientation sessions. The orientation process is as follows:

Visitor Orientation – Part 1 (September)

- Greeters are on-hand to welcome visitors
- The day begins at 9:00 and ends promptly at 3:00
- In addition to participating in all aspects of our AIC day, new members attend a general information session held in the afternoon.
- Visitors are asked to bring bag lunches and Bibles.

Visitor Orientation – Part 2 (October)

- Orientation begins at 9:00 and ends at noon
- The morning includes prayer and a more extensive overview of the AIC – including a review of membership guidelines and the AIC formation process.
- AIC membership Applications are distributed

November – December

- Visitors are asked to return the application by mid November
- Applications are reviewed by the AIC Council
- Mentors are selected for each new member in order to provide on-going support and information during the first year of formation

January

- New Members are welcomed into the AIC community as members of the initial formation group.

New Members Are Expected To:

- Identify one or more contemplative practices to pursue every day.
- Spend time each month thinking and praying about what has been learned at the AIC meeting, and seeking ways to incorporate it into daily life.
- Love and respect all members of the AIC community.
- Refrain from using the AIC as a means of promoting personal or political agendas.
- Support the AIC through annual dues and by being of service to the AIC community.

Formation Process

Lay Cistercians participate in a structured formation process during which time they are provided with information about Cistercian values and practices and are supported in their efforts to apply these in their lives. The teaching and example of the monks and nuns, the experience and wisdom of the committed members and the constant help of the community as a whole are of great value to individuals as they pass through the initial formation period and continue their ongoing spiritual journey.

(AIC Constitutions 3.1.8)

Our primary purpose as AIC members is to live and embody the Cistercian Charism in our lives. Living our lives as members of the AIC community, we are gradually transformed in the way of Christ. As a community we help each other learn and assimilate the following essential elements of the Cistercian way of life:

Initial Formation:

All AIC members are expected to participate in a 3-year formation process that includes a program of presentations and discussions that are offered during the teaching portion of each monthly meeting. Associates may remain in Initial Formation for longer than 3 years if this is the best path for them; however they must complete the entire track of presentations prior to making their AIC commitments.

- Asceticism
- Cistercian History and Documents
- Community
- Contemplation
- Conversion
- Discernment & Commitment
- Divine Office
- Enclosure
- Formation
- Humility
- Imitation of Christ
- Lectio/Scripture
- Obedience
- Prayer
- Psalms
- Rule of St. Benedict
- Silence & Solitude
- Simplicity & Poverty
- Stability
- Work as prayer

Discernment Process:

Toward the end of the initial formation period, members seek the prayerful support of their formators and committed AIC members in discerning whether they are being called to deepen their commitment to following Christ according to Cistercian values and practices.

Commitment:

Once members have discerned the call to make a personal commitment to the Cistercian way of life, they create their own individual statements to reflect particular things they are doing and will continue to do in order to be faithful to their calling. These statements of personal commitment are shared publicly during a simple ceremony with the AIC, New Melleray Abbey and Our Lady of the Mississippi Abbey communities.

Ongoing Formation:

After commitment and throughout their lives, Associates continue to discover what it means to follow Christ within a Cistercian community. The on-going formation program enables committed AIC members to draw from the riches of scriptural, patristic, liturgical, theological and spiritual resources in order to deepen their understanding of what is involved in living a Cistercian contemplative lifestyle in the world. On-going formation also includes a stronger emphasis on sharing individual talents and abilities in order to be of service within the AIC community.

AIC Retreats:

Members of both formation tracks have the opportunity to participate in weekend retreats that are offered by the AIC on a periodic basis. The entire AIC Community is expected to participate in a biennial retreat focusing on a particular aspect of the Cistercian Charism.

AIC Community

Associates have the right and duty to participate fully in the AIC community although this participation can be exercised in different ways. All are called to mutual care, mutual cooperation and mutual obedience. All are to be concerned for the spiritual state of the community which includes a willingness to respectfully share perspectives, ideas and concerns through active participation in monthly meetings.

(AIC Constitutions 4.2)

Participation and Involvement

In order to foster our formation in the Cistercian Charism and nurture growth in the AIC community we need to be present to one another through active participation in all aspects of each month's meeting. Therefore we are expected to:

- Set aside the second Saturday of every month for AIC meetings.
- Arrive at the monastery prior to Terce on AIC meeting days and stay until after the closing prayers in the afternoon.
- Be present for all aspects of our day together (Little Hours, Lectio, meditation, teaching presentations, business meetings, group discussions, etc.).
- Participate with the AIC community in the noon meal.
- Refrain from using AIC time to meet with spiritual directors, go to confession, browse in the gift shop, visit with monks or nuns, etc.

We are all responsible for the well being of our AIC community. During our monthly meetings we are expected to:

- Participate actively by speaking up during group discussions and those portions of the day when dialogue is encouraged.
- Show respect for each other by listening with our minds and hearts.
- Refrain from dominating discussions.
- Stay focused on the topic of discussion

Absences

We recognize that our life in the world involves family priorities and workplace obligations that may occasionally make it necessary for us to miss a monthly meeting. When we must miss a monthly meeting because of sickness, or family or workplace responsibilities it is expected that we will:

- Notify one of the other members of our formation group in advance of the meeting.

- Check the AIC website in order to listen to or read the audio presentations, and obtain the lectio suggestions and reflection questions. (It is the responsibility of members who do not have access to the website to contact another AIC member to obtain information, announcements or agendas.)

Most of our members are mindful when determining the need for an absence. A pattern of absences, however, creates a dynamic that brings a concern to the community. Therefore, absences should be the exception, not the rule. Members do not "accumulate" unused absences that can be used for an extended time or used to justify an absence for a reason other than sickness, or family or workplace responsibilities. Each must be accountable to the other.

AIC members who consistently miss meetings or make it a practice to leave early rather than participate in the full day will be contacted in order to help them decide whether or not to continue their membership.

Leaves of Absence

Occasionally members in ongoing formation encounter situations and circumstances beyond their control which severely limit their ability to attend AIC meetings on a regular basis. Should this be the case, individual needs will be taken into consideration. Ongoing members who must be away for an extended period of time are asked to contact the AIC Council and arrange for a leave of absence until such time as they are able to resume their membership.

Once a member has arranged for a leave of absence, he or she will be expected to maintain membership by checking the AIC website in order to listen to or read presentations, review lectio suggestions, and reflect on prayer sheet and discussion questions.

The AIC will endeavor to support its members who are on sabbatical by providing them with the name of someone from the AIC community who agrees to maintain contact with them via e-mail and telephone.

Loving Correction

If one of you is caught doing something wrong, those of you who are spiritual should set that person right in a spirit of gentleness; and watch yourselves that you are not tempted in the same way.

Gal 6:1-2

As Associates of the Iowa Cistercians, we recognize the importance of community, of “the unity which is based on charity and which has been the strength of the Cistercian order ever since its origins.” The love that forms the foundation of our community is characterized by accountability. Each member of the AIC is expected to be accountable to one another in sharing the responsibility for creating and nurturing the AIC community.

As members of our community we have mutual responsibilities, but we do not act independently of one another. Our dependence upon one another is one of concern and respectful love. Especially during our monthly meetings we have a responsibility not only to be present and prepared but also to help one another by fostering an environment conducive to prayer and formation.

We are all called to help one another understand how we are fostering or neglecting an atmosphere of prayerful, respectful, attentiveness. We work together to build an atmosphere of mutual accountability, based on trust and respect. Our words and actions must be rooted in a spirit of love and kindness, and flow from a sincere desire to help one another.

Our mutual accountability to one another and to the rules, norms and guidelines of our AIC community is a call to obedi-

ence. It is one more example of how we, as Associates, attempt to live our lives according to the Rule of St. Benedict by renouncing our own will in order to follow the example of Christ.

Community Life

As we follow the teachings of St. Benedict, we are reminded that AIC members are called to build up the community by means of mutual care, cooperation and obedience. We are also to be concerned with the spiritual state of the community which means a willingness to respectfully share our perspectives, ideas and concerns.

The decision to participate fully as a member of the AIC commits each of us to respect and acknowledge the unique personal opinions and beliefs of each member. However, as we discern our participation as AIC members, we are reminded that, as individuals within our community, we are not to use the AIC as a means to promote particular social or political issues or agendas that have the potential to divide us. We will therefore avoid any inference that our members should pray the same way, read the same books, vote or support the same political candidates or issues. At our meetings, prayer requests will be offered for the care and concern of our loved ones and those who have asked for our prayers.

Environment

Decorum brings a quality of graciousness and propriety to everything we say or do....in the monastic life it may be considered the spontaneous expression of an interior harmony, the exterior reverberation of an inner gracefulness and dignity. . .Decorum looks towards others and asks what effect this behavior will have on others with whom we live. Will it disturb them? Will it interrupt the silence and solitude to which they have a right? Will it cause them pain in any way? Or embarrassment? Monastic decorum is a basic expression of fraternal charity.

(Charles Cummings OCSO, Monastic Practices)

Silence

Living in the world and following in the footsteps of the Cistercians of the Strict Observance, members of the AIC aspire to that interior quiet in which wisdom is born. As members of the AIC, we are called to help preserve the quiet tranquility of the monastic environment, thereby ensuring that our personal behavior does not disturb the silence and solitude of others.

We seek to maintain a quiet atmosphere while we are at the monasteries speaking as little as possible and being mindful of the volume and content of our speech. We will maintain silence when going and coming from Terce, Sext and None, during a portion of our noon meal, as well as between the end of the afternoon discussion period and closing prayers..

Those who wish to speak during the morning gathering time prior to our monthly meetings, or during the afternoon interval time may use the on-going formation room located outside the monastic enclosure. The coffee room, guest dining room, and speaking parlors are also available for conversation.

AIC members who stay at the monastery overnight are asked to use the speaking parlors for conversation instead of talking in the Guesthouse hallways and sleeping rooms. During Grand Silence, which begins at Compline and lasts through morning Lauds, all will refrain from speaking. AIC members are asked to respect one another's needs regarding conversation in the Guesthouse dining hall. While some may wish to socialize during meals, we are to respect the needs of those who choose to eat in silence.

When the AIC meets at Mississippi Abbey we will strive to maintain an atmosphere of silence in the meeting space at the St. Benedict Center by using the kitchen and small parlors for quiet conversation. We will speak quietly when outside; however, we

will refrain from speaking when going and coming from the chapel for prayer.

Decorum

AIC members are urged to remember that "Monastic Decorum" is an abiding value fostering gracious communal living. It is our communal responsibility to adhere, in concrete ways, to the quiet serenity of the monastic environment. For example, we will walk quietly, and open and close doors carefully to thereby become more comfortable with being silent in the presence of others.

In keeping with our commitment to observe the customs of monastic decorum, AIC members are expected to dress in a manner that is appropriate and respectful of both communities when attending monthly meetings. Shorts in the summer months or other revealing clothing are not considered acceptable dress and members are encouraged to always be mindful of the request to dress in a sensible manner. Members should also be careful to turn cell phones off, and avoid wearing fragrances.

Monastic Enclosure

Those who prefer nothing to the love of Christ make themselves strangers to the ways of the world. In the monastic tradition this involves a certain degree of physical separation. For this reason, the monastery is built so that it safeguards the quiet and solitude of those who reside there.

(Adapted from New Melleray Guidelines)

An essential component of the Cistercian vocation is an effective solitude. The AIC has been granted the privilege of entering certain parts of the monastic enclosure during our monthly meetings. It is incumbent upon us, therefore, to ensure that we do not violate this privilege by wandering beyond the limited portion of the enclosure to which we have been granted access

or speaking loudly when we are within the enclosure. Membership within the AIC does not entitle us to assume privileges of access beyond the courtesy already extended. Rather, it gives us the responsibility to guard the monastics' right to silence and solitude.

Hospitality

Just as every Cistercian monastery welcomes guests as Christ, so also visitors to the AIC must be received with reverence and kindness without allowing this service to interfere with the primary goals of the community.

(AIC Constitutions 7)

Because of the size of our membership and the need for new members to enter the initial formation program at the same time, a visitor orientation day is held once each year. We are all responsible for welcoming newcomers and helping them get acquainted with the members of our community. We are called to extend hospitality and encouragement to our new members throughout the year by:

- Making it a point to greet them each month.
- Sitting with them during the noon meal.
- Including them in conversations during interval time.
- Keeping in contact via e-mail when appropriate.
- AIC Members are asked not to invite friends and family members to monthly meetings because of space constraints and confidentiality issues.
- Members who are making their AIC Commitments are encouraged to invite guests to the ceremony; however it is necessary to notify the person who is in charge of planning the event in order to make the necessary arrangements.

Leadership

As often as anything important is to be done in the monastery, the abbot shall call the whole community together and himself explain what the business is; and after hearing the advice of the brothers, let him ponder it and follow what he judges the wiser course.

(RB 3:1,2)

In the spirit of the Rule of St. Benedict, the AIC community depends on a shared leadership structure in order to direct and nurture the growth of the community in prayer and charity by such means as:

- The AIC Council
- Consultation with members of On-going formation
- Community dialogue
- Service to the community

The AIC Council

The AIC Council is comprised of nine individuals: one representative from initial formation, two monastic representatives (one from each monastery), and six representatives from on-going formation.

- Initial formation representative: appointed position, held until the person makes a personal commitment.
- Monastic representatives: appointed by the Abbot and Abbess of the two monasteries.
- On-going formation representatives:
- Five elected positions: 4-year term, may be re-elected.
- Secretary/Treasurer: appointed, 4-year term, may be reappointed.

In reflecting upon the Council and its functions, we rely heavily upon the Rule, looking carefully at leadership responsibilities and processes as they occur within the monastery as a model for the AIC (see, for instance, Chapters 2, 3 and 64).

The AIC Council works in a dialogical relationship with the members of the AIC community. (Routine and purely administrative functions are kept within the Council in order not to interfere with time for teaching and community building at the monthly meetings.) Important topics are brought to the community and, having received input, the Council follows what it judges the wiser course. When appropriate, business items may be taken to senior members of the community or members in on-going formation for discussion and input. All decisions are based upon the Rule.

Council members not only act on behalf of the community as a whole, they also have individual roles related to teaching, providing consistent and good example, avoiding favoritism, and meeting the individual needs of members individually.

Election Procedure

Elections are held every two years with either two or three positions available for election.

All the members of ongoing formation are eligible. The list of eligible candidates will be posted for discernment in June. Members who do not want to serve on the Council, or who do not feel that they can fulfill the requirements for a Council member, have the responsibility for asking that their names be removed from consideration. By August a list of people willing to serve will be finalized.

Those who agree to be considered for election are asked to prayerfully reflect on the discernment questions. Candidates are also asked to meet informally with a current Council member in order to discuss what the role entails.

The members of ongoing formation vote before Terce. Only those present may vote. There are no absentee ballots or proxy

voting. The monastic representatives, acting as the scrutators, count the ballots during Terce. When two (or three) candidates receive a majority of the votes, the election is complete. If one or none of the positions did not receive a majority, there will be a second ballot. If a third ballot is necessary, the monastic representatives will select the two or three who received the most votes.

Elections will occur in November. Election is by a two-thirds majority. Newly elected individuals will take their place on the Council following the election.

Participation in the AIC Council

Participation in the AIC Council is an important calling to stewardship. As such, it requires an understanding of the AIC, its history, functions and goals, as well as personal dedication and experience. In order to participate on the AIC Council, an individual:

- Must make a commitment of time in their schedules in order to attend meetings on a regular basis. In order to avoid unnecessary infringement on family time and weekends, the Council meets 5-6 times per year on varying days of the week at one of the two monasteries.
- Is dependable. Members of the Council must be able to rely on fellow members to follow through on tasks and commitments they have agreed to undertake. In addition, members of the Council represent and, especially to those in initial formation, model a lifestyle committed to living the Rule in the world. They model appropriate interaction, both personal and as a Council, with members of the two monastic communities.
- Maintains confidentiality regarding all issues relating to individuals, the community as a whole, and the monks and nuns of the two monasteries.

Community Dialogue

All AIC members have a share in building and maintaining the AIC community. The Council has the responsibility for seeking community input when making decisions and for keeping members informed about decisions that affect them. All are expected to take part in community discussions in a spirit of openness and mutual cooperation, showing respect for each other by listening attentively and responding honestly. It is expected that questions, problems or concerns be dealt with in a spirit of charity and mutual respect.

Members are expected to be present for business meetings and to keep abreast of decisions and details that pertain to policies, procedures, and community announcements. When a member must miss a meeting it is his or her responsibility to check the website or contact another member for information that was discussed in his or her absence. Minutes from business meetings are posted on the website.

Service to the community

Members are encouraged to recognize that any kind of service to others that flows as a response to the gifts of God's grace is a way of being true to the spirit of our call to the AIC. We depend on members of both formation tracks to assist with the various tasks that are involved in keeping our community running efficiently. Everyone who is able to volunteer is expected to do so when asked to help out in a particular way and those with special talents and gifts will be given the opportunity to share their skills for the benefit of all.

In a spirit of mutual cooperation, members are expected to volunteer for specific tasks or check first with the Council rather than taking it upon themselves to initiate a course of action without being asked.

Living the Cistercian Charism in the World

Charity

Members of the AIC are committed to living Cistercian lives in the world. Cistercian communities are schools of charity which is the double love of God and neighbor that arises only from true self-knowledge. As we grow more deeply into a contemplative life in the world, our ever-deepening growth in love shows forth in a lively appreciation of the world and people around us, even when we see that they, like us, are flawed.

Tools

The tools of the contemplative life identified in the AIC Constitutions include sharing in the public worship of the Church in daily offices and Eucharist, and private prayer and study, including but not limited to lectio divina and the Rule of Saint Benedict. These are the basis of our lives in Christ and form part of our daily routine as much as possible. As we progress, we discover we have more time for these core practices.

Benedictine Values

Some of the Benedictine values held by Cistercians are stability, conversion of life, and obedience. Stability in our daily lives means being faithful to our natural communities, our families, work places, and society. Conversion of life means shedding the unhelpful attitudes and practices of our society in favor of Gospel simplicity and peace. Where obedience is not a matter of simply following directions, it is the attentiveness that lets us truly appreciate and respond to the needs of others.

Cistercian Values

Other key Cistercian values are poverty and simplicity. For us, poverty first means generous giving to church and charities remembering that this is not a matter of convenience but a spiri-

- Maintains a sense of enclosure personally, and encourages the members of the community to respect the physical boundaries of the monastery as well as the personal boundaries of the monks and nuns.
- Works in a spirit of cooperation. Council members work collaboratively with one another in situations that involve flexibility rather than control, negotiation rather than argument, and shared rather than unilateral decision-making.

Functions of the Council

The function of the AIC Council is twofold: 1) to provide the tools and resources needed for individual members to fulfill the contemplative lifestyle they have chosen to live in the world, and 2) to provide pastoral guidance and direction within the community. The Council seeks the Spirit working through and in the AIC in order to recognize how the community is being moved and shaped.

Other than the secretary, none of the positions on the Council have predetermined responsibilities. Rather, the Council works in an atmosphere of collegiality in which tasks and responsibilities are shared equally. Some of the tasks that the Council fulfills and oversees include:

- Help develop policies, procedures and guidelines that benefit the overall structure and efficacy of the AIC as a community.
- Develop and utilize appropriate channels of communication with the membership; recognize and honor communication channels with the monks and nuns in the two monasteries.
- Encourage application of monthly teaching through group discussion, and personal application in the home setting.
- Correspond with persons interested in joining the AIC.

- Coordinate the annual Visitor Day in September.
- Plan and facilitate monthly meetings (arrange for presenters, help with discussion questions, select lectio readings, invite meal readers and Rule readers, etc).
- Develop, oversee and coordinate the initial formation process.
- Develop, oversee and coordinate the on-going re-commitment process.
- Develop and maintain the AIC website including review and revision of materials.
- Complete special projects such as providing copies of antiphonary, little hours booklets, etc.
- Plan and facilitate annual retreats.
- Work with representatives of both monasteries to handle meeting logistics (reserving Guest House rooms, determining schedule, room setup, lunch coordination, etc.) with a special emphasis on honoring and maintaining monastic enclosure.
- Seek and receive input and guidance from the Abbot and Abbess of the two monasteries.
- Seek and receive input and guidance from senior members of the AIC community as well as from the community as a whole.
- Other duties as they arise...

Consultation with members of On-going formation

In keeping with the monastic leadership model which seeks input from the senior members of the community, the AIC Council depends on feedback and advice of its senior members - those who have made their AIC commitments and are members of the on-going formation group. From time to time the seniors will be expected to use a portion of their monthly meeting time to provide input and assistance in discussing issues that relate to the well-being of the entire community.

tual necessity. Valuing poverty saves us from the greed that drives us to work harder and harder for money and things that we really do not need. External simplicity frees us of the compulsion to consume and compete, while internal simplicity frees us from being judgmental and opens us to everything around us. We can do nothing without God.

Cistercian Asceticism

AIC members strive to practice healthy asceticism, mindful that our practices are more than self improvement programs. We ask ourselves, what gets in the way of expressing our love for God. And we are willing to struggle with what controls our life, out of love for God and love for our brothers and sisters.

The ascetic life is pursued in silence apart from the world with fasting, manual labor, and vigils. Silence is necessary to make space for God in our daily lives. We quiet our world by limiting our use of the media, particularly television and the Internet. The silence thus attained gives us a place for holiness. Fasting means at least monastic moderation in eating, but can also mean more serious discipline to help us lose weight or overcome our addictions to drugs or alcohol. Work is a normal part of most lives, but most of us do relatively little manual work and so we find ways of getting the kind of healthy exercise which grounds us in our bodies. We keep vigil by using our periods of wakefulness for prayer or waking early to spend time with the Lord.

Our Hope

Thanks to our perseverance in a Cistercian style of life, we develop the personal integrity that is grounded only in Christ. Our communion with God and all our companions is deepened, filling our lives with love, peace, joy, and thanksgiving.

Statement of Appreciation and Challenge

Over the past several years New Melleray and Mississippi Abbey have been sharing our Cistercian Charism with a group of lay persons who have adopted the name, "Associates of Iowa Cistercians" ~ the AICs.

We believe it is appropriate for New Melleray to make a statement in support of this group. We begin by quoting the letter of our Abbot General of Jan. 1, 1995 entitled, "The Challenge of Charismatic Associations": "Let us say first of all that our charism like all charisms is a gift of the Spirit to build up the church as the body of Christ. No one possesses the Cistercian Charism as private property. Our Charism basically belongs to the Church. The Spirit can share it with whomever He wants, in whatever measure and in whatever form." (Page 5.)

Our experience shows us that the Holy Spirit is sharing the Cistercian charism with our AIC community. We are one Cistercian family building up "the Christian and Cistercian life, in the cloister and outside the cloister".

We are affirming our association with the AIC community because we believe in our hearts that the Holy Spirit is inviting us to share our vocation with those who are searching for a way to incorporate Cistercian monastic values into their daily life. It has been a mutually enriching experience.

Each community has its own identity that must be preserved. Our lay associates call us to a more faithful living of our life and challenge us to have a clearer sense of our charism as a Cistercian community.

The Abbot General says we can "unite by differentiating, as true love does". He lists three challenges:

1. How to establish and organize an adequate link and equality.
2. How to safeguard the indispensable differences and autonomies.
3. How to establish formation programs without falling into apostolic activity foreign to our life

As we move into the next phase of sharing our vocations we want to work together so that the good already achieved will not only be preserved but will grow and develop. To ensure this we believe that goals and expectations need to be clearly expressed. To that end we would like to state here what New Melleray is willing to provide to foster our mutual growth:

As far as possible we will:

1. Provide an ambiance of prayer and silence.
2. Provide hospitality in our guest house.
3. Provide a place to hold monthly meetings.
4. Provide the basement chapel for meditation.
5. Provide conferences and instructions from community members.
6. Participate liturgically in the AIC commitment ceremony.
7. Brother Paul and Father Neil represent the community to the AIC members and it is through them that our community norms can be expressed to the group. We realize everything can not be written down on paper, so it is important to have frequent and open communication between our communities.

March 9, 2001

AIC Acceptance

The community of Our Lady of the Mississippi, by vote of the conventual chapter, affirm and recognize the ASSOCIATES of the IOWA CISTERCIANS (AIC) as a group of lay men and women drawn by the Holy Spirit to live as fully as possible the Cistercian charism.

We will do all that we can, in collaboration with the monks of New Melleray Abbey, to encourage the members of the AIC and to:

- provide a place for meetings as our space allows and an ambiance of prayer and silence
- offer monastic teaching and guidance
- appoint a sister to be a liaison with AIC
- participate liturgically in the AIC commitment ritual
- pray for the associates, their families and their intentions
- We believe this work of the Spirit in our midst to be a source of grace for the world, the church and for our community.

Sister Gail and Community

October 11, 2003