

# Membership Guidelines Associates of the Iowa Cistercians

Revised and approved March 2013

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## 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 over view 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.

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

### **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
- Psalms/Prayer
- Rule of St. Benedict

- Silence & Solitude
- Simplicity & Poverty
- Stability
- Work as prayer
- Cistercian Charism

### **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.

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## 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 obedience. 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.



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## 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 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.

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## 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 eight individuals: two monastic representatives, and, from on-going formation, four elected positions and two appointed positions.

- Two Monastic representatives, one from each Monastery, appointed by the Abbot and Abbess.
- Four elected positions: 4-year term, may be re-elected.
- Formation Team Member: appointed, 4-year term, may be reappointed  
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 two 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 simple 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 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.

- 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 in cooperation with the Formation Team and others 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 antiphony, little hours' booklets, etc.
- Plan and facilitate community 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.

## **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 community 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 community 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.

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## **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 spiritual 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.

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## **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.

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# Letters of Support

## 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 cannot 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, affirms and recognizes 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