

## CONSTITUTIONS and STATUTES

### Lay Cistercians of Holy Cross Abbey

#### Preface

1. We are an ecumenical, Christian community of women and men who are drawn to the Cistercian charism. We profess our faith through the words of the Nicene Creed. We are open to all who desire to prefer nothing to the love of Christ. As lovers of the place, we have been drawn from a wide geographical area to meet monthly at Holy Cross Abbey. Regular meetings enhance our interaction with each other, enrich our dialogue and formation, provide support to our commitment to the Cistercian charism, and assist us in bearing witness in our home communities. Statute P.1.a: The requirement for profession of faith through the Nicene Creed is shared with all Inquirers.
2. Through the Cistercian charism, we seek our transformation in Christ within the common Bond of Charity. This bond strengthens community and is expressed in mutual support, shared prayer and in our hospitality to each other.
3. In the enduring Cistercian tradition, we are lovers of the brethren, the monks of Holy Cross Abbey and of each other. The Lay Cistercians are formally recognized by the Chapter of Holy Cross Abbey and have a relationship specific to Holy Cross Abbey. The Lay Cistercians and the monastic community of Holy Cross Abbey are committed to mutual prayerful support and appropriate service to each other. As a concrete symbol of this bond, when possible, the Abbot provides a monk as spiritual advisor and liaison between the Lay Cistercians and the monastic community.
4. As lovers of the Holy Rule, we seek closer union with God by drawing inspiration and guidance from the monastic tradition and the Constitutions of the Cistercian Order of the Strict Observance and incorporating Benedictine principles appropriate to our state of life. The foundations of our formation are the Benedictine principles of obedience, humility, stability and *conversatio morum*. We recognize the necessity of silence, solitude and simplicity in our formation.

## Part One - The Lay Cistercian Spirit

### 1. The School of Charity

In this school of charity we recognize that we are always beginners, who have infinitely more to learn from the Master, our Lord Jesus Christ. In the spirit of charity, we strive to see the other as a beloved Child of God, in whom Christ is formed.

### 2. The Spirit of Humility

In the spirit of humility we keep always before us the awareness that each one's gifts are from God, that to God alone belongs the glory, and that we are totally dependent on God for everything.

### 3. The Spirit of Peace and Reconciliation

In the spirit of peace, we seek to grow in self-knowledge and self-discipline by centering ourselves in Christ. In our quest for harmony and concord we shun all that brings discord, division or does any harm to the other. When discord and dissension do occur, as they are bound to do in any community, we seek to maintain our loving relationship with one another, as witness to the alternative God offers to a broken world.

### 4. The Spirit of Obedience

We desire to live out the love of Christ in the spirit of obedience in our Lay Cistercian community. Members strive to renounce self-will and to follow the example of Christ, whose food was to do the will of his Father in heaven.

### 5. The Spirit of Stability

In the spirit of stability, we seek to persevere in the commitment we have made, trusting in the grace and providence of God, who has called us to this community.

## 6. The Spirit of Conversatio Morum

In the spirit of conversatio morum, we commit to be open to the work of the Holy Spirit enabling us to grow and flourish in fidelity to the Lay Cistercian way of life.

### Part Two - The Lay Cistercian Way of Life

#### Personal Life as a Lay Cistercian

1. Prompted by their desire to follow Saint Paul's injunction to pray without ceasing, Lay Cistercians strive to carry out the following practices, as expressed in the Bond of Charity and in paragraphs 2-8 below.
2. We hold the Rule of Saint Benedict as our guide for living the Gospel in our daily lives by the practice of humility, stability, obedience, and continual conversion. Statute 7.2.a: All read the assigned section of the Rule of Saint Benedict daily.
3. Like all Cistercian communities, we invoke Mary, assumed into Heaven, as our Patroness and we acknowledge that each person is dedicated to her in a special way. We recognize Mary as the Mother and pattern of the Church in faith, love, and perfect union with Christ.
4. As the celebration of the Eucharist is the focal point of the Cistercian day, we Lay Cistercians hold as an ideal the daily reception of the Eucharist as a sign of our union with Christ and with one another. Sunday worship with our individual faith communities is an important expression of our commitment to welcome Christ in the person of our brothers and sisters in the world.
5. In our daily schedule we endeavor to pray one or more of the Hours of the Divine Office. When praying the Divine Office we join in spirit with our Cistercian brothers and sisters.
6. We deem periods of silence and solitude essential to maintaining a contemplative life of prayer and work. We also strive to simplify our lives in order to be more faithful to our special calling as Lay Cistercians.
7. We invoke the Holy Spirit to guide us as we encounter the inspired word of God in our daily lectio divina.

8. To help maintain and foster our growth in the Cistercian charism, each individual endeavors to make a personal retreat at a Cistercian monastery at least once a year. Lay Cistercians attend an annual community retreat at Holy Cross Abbey.
9. Members seek “solitude of the heart” by shunning all that distracts and dissipates the spirit and undermines the reign of God’s peace within.
10. Members seek regular spiritual direction to enhance our own spiritual formation and to benefit our faith communities.

### Corporate Life as Lay Cistercians

1. All members have a right and duty to participate fully, according to their gifts, in the building up of the community.
  - Professed Lay Cistercians vote in all chapter meetings unless their voting privileges have been suspended as provided for in the Statutes.
  - Observers, Postulants, Novices and Professed use their talents for the good of the community.
  - Annual dues are paid by Postulants, Novices, and Professed. If the payment of these dues is a hardship, one may apply to the Council to modify this requirement.
2. All are called to mutual care and mutual cooperation, knowing that the good zeal of one is a help to all, whereas bitter zeal is a hindrance.
3. Attendance at the monthly meetings is a mark of commitment to the Lay Cistercian way of life.
  - In the event of medical necessity or other emergency situation, a Novice may apply to the Lay Cistercian Council for up to a six months’ leave of absence. If necessary, an extension of up to six additional months may be made. Upon return the Novice resumes the Novitiate. The Council may modify the terms and conditions of this leave of absence.
  - In the event of medical necessity or other emergency situation, a Professed member may apply to the Lay Cistercian Council for up to six months’ leave of absence. During this time and for 3 months after returning, voting privileges are suspended. If necessary, one may apply again for up to an additional six months’

leave of absence under the same conditions. The Council may modify the terms and conditions of this leave of absence. If a Professed member does not return after one year leave of absence, association with the Lay Cistercians of Holy Cross Abbey is considered at an end.

- In the event of permanent infirmity or disability which prevents regular attendance at monthly meetings, a Professed member may apply for associate status. When granted, the Associate Lay Cistercian has no voting privileges and is invited to the annual retreat, profession ceremonies, and other important community events.
  - A Lay Cistercian who does not attend the monthly meeting for three months in a row and does not apply to the Lay Cistercian Council for a leave of absence, will be considered to have permanently ended association with the Lay Cistercians of Holy Cross Abbey, at the start of the fourth month. This is not considered a legitimate departure from the community.
  - One who has legitimately left the Lay Cistercians of Holy Cross Abbey at the end of the novitiate or after profession may be readmitted by the Chapter without the obligation of repeating the novitiate. Persons seeking readmission are to apply to the Dean who will notify the Council and Chapter who together determine the form and duration of a new term of probation.
  - One who has left the Lay Cistercians before completing the Novitiate may apply to the Coordinator of Inquirers to request to begin formation again as an Observer.
4. The governance of the Lay Cistercians will strive to follow the Cistercian model of a service of authority. We look to the Abbot of Holy Cross Abbey as Christ's representative among us.
  5. Particular practices may be modified by the Lay Cistercian Council or Chapter to reflect the needs of a lay group whose members live in the world apart from one another.
  6. Ministry of Leadership: The Lay Cistercian Council will serve the community in all humility and charity, always seeking for each member what is holy and good. Those chosen are to fulfill their offices cheerfully and worthily, so that no one may be disturbed or saddened, or caused to stumble by their leadership. Members are

to support and uphold the Lay Cistercian Council to the mutual benefit of the entire community.

7. The Lay Cistercian Council and its Dean are elected by professed Lay Cistercians.
  - Elections are held annually by secret written ballot.
  - All Professed members appear on the ballot to serve as Council members.
  - Professed Lay Cistercians who cannot be present at the election may ask another Professed Lay Cistercian to act as their proxy in all votes held on the day of the election. Anyone wishing to exercise this right must notify a member of the Council before the election.
  - The five members with the most votes constitute the Council. In the case of a tie, a runoff is held.
  - Following the Council election, the members of the Council constitute the ballot list for the position of Dean. The Council member with the most votes is the Dean. In the case of a tie, a runoff is held.
  - The new Council and Dean take their offices at the monthly meeting following the election.

## Formation

1. Formation to Cistercian life, as to all Christian life, has as its purpose the restoration of the divine likeness in each person through the working of the Holy Spirit.
2. The Lay Cistercian community's role in the process of formation is to help each member assimilate the essential elements of the Cistercian way of life.
  - The Coordinator of Inquirers assists Observers throughout the Observership.
  - At least one Professed member serves as a formal support and guide to the Postulants and Novices throughout the formation process.
3. Formation continues throughout life, based on the Rule of Saint Benedict and the Cistercian patrimony, and draws from the riches of biblical, liturgical, and spiritual theology.

- The content and timing associated with each period of formation, including ongoing formation for the Professed, is coordinated with the Monastic Spiritual Advisor.
- 4. The Lay Cistercian formation process follows the monastic pattern, from Inquirer, through Observer, Postulant and Novice to Professed. During the Observership, which lasts approximately four months, one participates by attending the monthly meetings. Formation begins with the Postulancy (approximately one year) and continues with the Novitiate (approximately three years). Following profession, formation continues as long as one is part of the Lay Cistercian community.

### Promises

1. Mutual discernment and promises underlie the entire Lay Cistercian formation process. Each person who asks to explore must be aware the journey of formation leads to profession and cannot be embarked upon without being free to make that promise.
  - No one shall begin the Observership without being free to make promises. Anyone who has been a Secular Franciscan, Benedictine Oblate, or member of a similar association shall furnish the Coordinator of Inquirers, before the date for the Observership is set, with proof that she is not currently bound by promises to that association.
2. Progression through formation will require mutual discernment before a deeper commitment is made, as from Observer to Postulant. Discernment requires conversations with God and with the community in order to ensure readiness and the call to move to the next level of commitment. We trust the Holy Spirit to be active in this mutual discernment. By allowing a time of reflection and examination we trust the Holy Spirit will reveal a call to renewed commitment and continued formation or a call to another path.
  - The process of mutual discernment varies as commitment deepens. An Observer may become a Postulant unless the simple majority of the Council, in consultation with the Monastic Spiritual Advisor, does not approve. A Postulant's request to

become a Novice is subject to approval by two-thirds of the Professed Lay Cistercians present for the vote. A Novice's request to make promises is subject to approval by two-thirds of the Professed Lay Cistercians present for the vote.

3. Promises of stability to the Lay Cistercians of Holy Cross Abbey, obedience to the Abbot of Holy Cross Abbey, the Lay Cistercian Council and its Dean, to family and other legitimate authority, and *conversatio morum* as we seek transformation in Christ, are first made after a Novice has completed the Novitiate. These promises are re-affirmed annually. The mutual discernment preceding a promise is a time of examination and preparation which may lead to making or re-affirming a promise, or may lead to realization that one's call is leading elsewhere.
  - o Promises are made and re-affirmed annually in the presence of the Abbot and members of the monastic community by making this statement of profession: I, N., promise my stability, fidelity to the Lay Cistercian way of life, and obedience according to my state in life, under the Rule of Saint Benedict, Abbot, and in accordance with the Constitutions and Statutes of the Lay Cistercians of Holy Cross Abbey. I do this before God and all his saints, in this Abbey of Our Lady of the Holy Cross of the Cistercian Order of the Strict Observance, constructed in honor of the Blessed and ever Virgin Mary, Mother of God, and in the presence of Dom N., abbot of this monastery, N., Dean of the Lay Cistercians of Holy Cross Abbey, and all the brethren.

### Maintaining Harmony

1. Because of the serious effect of discord and disorder on the spirit of the community, as necessary the Dean and the Council will discern proper discipline to restore harmony to the community. Guided by the Rule of Saint Benedict, they will intercede with private warnings to a discordant member of the Lay Cistercian community and, if necessary, with public conversation in the Lay Cistercian community. The Dean and Council will set disciplines in due proportion to the seriousness of the discord, ranging from temporary limits on participation to permanent removal from the community.



- This process is coordinated with the Monastic Spiritual Advisor.

#### Relationship to Holy Cross Abbey

#### Pastoral Care

1. The Abbot exercises pastoral care of the Lay Cistercians through prayer, the provision of a Monastic Spiritual Advisor and regular visitations. While respecting autonomy of the Lay Cistercian community, the Abbot watches over the progress of the community, supports it in its spiritual formation and fosters concord among its members.
  2. Monastic Spiritual Advisor: The spiritual formation of the Lay Cistercians is guided by a monastic spiritual advisor provided by the Abbot, as far as possible.
  3. Annual Visitation: The purpose of the regular visitation is to strengthen the Lay Cistercian community and to motivate the members to lead the Lay Cistercian life with a renewed spiritual fervor. This requires the active cooperation of the Lay Cistercian community.
- During the visitation, the Abbot meets with the Dean and Lay Cistercian Council and the Lay Cistercian community. He also makes himself available for individual meetings, if requested.

#### Service to the Monastic Community:

1. Lay Cistercians provide prayerful support to the monastic community and such other service as may be requested by the Abbot.
- Any services provided by a Lay Cistercian to the monastic community shall be with the prior knowledge of the Abbot.

#### Changes to the Lay Cistercian Constitutions and Statutes:

1. The constitutions of the Lay Cistercians of Holy Cross Abbey may be changed with the approval of the Abbot and his Monastic Council. The statutes of the Lay Cistercians of Holy Cross Abbey may be changed by the Lay Cistercian Chapter.
  - Changes to these constitutions may be suggested by any member of the Lay Cistercian community. The Lay Cistercian Council will take up any suggested changes for discernment as to need and appropriateness. The Lay Cistercian Council must propose new constitutions for Chapter review and voting. Changes approved by the Lay Cistercian Chapter will be sent to the Abbot and his Council and the constitutions will be updated only after receiving the necessary approval.
  - Changes to these statutes may be suggested by any member of the Lay Cistercian community. The Lay Cistercian Council will take up any suggested changes for discernment as to need and appropriateness. The Lay Cistercian Council must propose new statutes for Chapter review and voting.

In the Joy of the Holy Spirit

These are the constitutions and statutes of the Lay Cistercians of Holy Cross Abbey. May God grant that through the Holy Spirit we may observe them in fraternal charity and fidelity to the Church, and so joyfully make our way to the fullness of Love with the help of the Blessed Virgin Mary, the Queen of Cîteaux.