

Charter and Statutes of the Cistercian Lay Contemplative Community (CLC) of Spencer, Massachusetts

(Revised 03/2012)

History and Overview

The Cistercian Lay Contemplatives (CLC) of Spencer, Massachusetts are a small group of lay women and men who seek to deepen their interior life by becoming immersed in the Cistercian spirit and charism within the framework of a lay community. Honoring the integrity of the Cistercian monastic tradition, CLC members enrich their lives by adapting those spiritual practices which are compatible with a non-monastic lifestyle, thereby becoming examples for our families, neighbors, parishes, and workplaces.

The Cistercian Lay Contemplatives of Spencer were founded in June in the year of our Lord 2000. The Abbot, Dom. Damian Carr, already active in exploring the emergence of Cistercian lay groups associated with other Abbeys, appointed a monk as guide and liaison and granted permission for our group to begin meeting. At the present time, we are provisionally recognized by Our Lady of St. Joseph's Abbey as a Lay Cistercian community in formation, with the goal of receiving more formal recognition at a later date. The CLC of Spencer is a recognized member of the *International Association of Lay Cistercian Communities*.

The Cistercian Lay Contemplatives of Gethsemani, our "motherhouse", were founded in the late 1980's at the Abbey of Gethsemani in Kentucky. From this group, the Cistercian Lay Contemplative Plan of Life was written. Elements of this document, such as prayer, work, silence, solitude, and sacred reading, mirror the elements of the Rule of St. Benedict (RB), the monastic rule which Cistercian monks and nuns follow.

The CLC of Spencer embraces the Plan of Life, which serves as our guide to develop, in our secular lives, a contemplative spirituality in accordance with the Cistercian tradition. In addition, the CLC of Spencer recognizes and adopts the Lay Cistercian Identity document, approved in 2008 at the International Lay Cistercian Encounter in Huerta, Spain. This document gives expression to our identity as Lay Cistercians and describes the values we wish to live and commit ourselves to.

CLC Governance

The CLC governing body is referred to as the Lay Council. The Lay Council is currently comprised of three CLC members.

Formation and Function of the Lay Council

The Lay Council was initially formed in the year of Our Lord 2004 as a decision making body to develop structure, impart information, and implement existing initiatives for the Lay Community. The current Lay Council structure was established in October 2010. The Lay Council is responsible for the direction, facilitation, stability and ongoing development of the Lay Community. The Lay Council performs these functions in collaboration with CLC members and our monk liaison/spiritual guide.

The Lay Council and monk liaison/spiritual guide meets monthly to address issues related to the ongoing formation, guidance and development of the Lay Community.

Lay Council Service and Member Qualifications

To seek appointment or election to the Lay Council a member must complete his/her First Commitment, having completed his/her initial formation plus two full years of ongoing formation and at least two (2) Reflection Statements (see Membership and Expectations below).

Lay Council members are chosen or replaced by means of an election, in which CLC members who have completed their First Commitment may vote.

Membership and Expectations

Inquirers

An individual may submit an inquiry via email, postal mail, or verbally express interest to anyone in the Monastic Community or the Cistercian Lay Contemplative community. This information is then transmitted to the Lay Council, who contacts the individual and begins the information process. An Inquirer will be provided copies of the CLC Plan of Life, along with the CLC Statement to Inquirers for his/her review.

Letter of Intent

If an Inquirer, having reviewed the Statement to Inquirers and CLC Plan of Life wishes to enter into an Observership, a Letter of Intent will be required. A representative of the Lay Council will accept the letter, provide additional information, and arrange a meeting with the Inquirer.

Observership

Observerships ideally begin in January, but may commence at any time during the year at the discretion of the Lay Community. Individuals entering this phase of entry into the Lay Community are required to attend three regular consecutive meetings for discernment before making application to the next phase.

Candidate Application

An Observer will submit a completed Candidate Application (provided by the Lay Council) prior to attending a fourth meeting. The Candidate Application will be reviewed by the Lay Council and the CLC monk liaison. Upon approval, the candidate then enters the Candidate Formation phase.

Candidate Formation

This phase begins at the Candidate's fourth meeting and extends through the next eleven months, for a total of one (1) year. Faithful attendance and participation throughout this process is mandatory.

Discernment Reflection Statement

Before a Candidate makes his/her Initial Commitment to the Lay Community, they must submit to the Lay Council a Discernment Reflection Statement for consideration. Approval for the Candidate to make their Initial Commitment is required from the Lay Council and the monk liaison in collaboration with CLC members.

Initial Commitment

Those who make their Initial Commitment do so for a period of not less than one (1) year.

First Commitment

Those making their First Commitment submit a Reflection Statement to the Lay Council prior to this next step of commitment to the Lay Community. Individuals remain in this stage for not less than eighteen (18) months before making their first Renewal of Commitment.

Renewal of Commitment

Those who make a Renewal do so on an annual basis. A Reflection Statement is required prior to making this renewal. The Reflection Statement is submitted to the Lay Council for consideration.

Meetings

The Lay Community meets eleven times a year on the second Saturday of each month (there is no meeting in July). Regular monthly meetings are held in the St. Joseph's Abbey Retreat House Conference Room, commencing with the Prayer of None and closing with the Prayer of Vespers (prayed with the Abbey community). At monthly meetings, the Lay Community may meet during the hour preceding None for candidate formation and/or group business. There is an annual CLC fall weekend retreat, which meets Friday through Sunday in the Abbey Retreat House. The annual CLC Picnic in June and Advent Day of Prayer in December meet for a full day at the Abbey Grange.

Attendance and Participation

As emphasized in the Rule of Benedict, Lay Cistercian Identity document, and the Cistercian monastic tradition, we recognize the essential role of community in our ongoing spiritual formation and development. Through the bonds and unity that are formed in community, we learn and practice the important values of stability, charity, humility, and service. Commitment to the Lay Cistercian community requires faithful attendance and participation at monthly meetings. Members are expected to attend all meetings and are asked to notify the group and/or Lay Council in advance if they expect to miss a meeting. Members who miss a meeting without prior notice will be contacted by phone or e mail by the Lay Council or its representative to inform them of the missed meeting. Except in rare circumstances, three (3) absences in the course of a calendar year will require a meeting with the Lay Council and monk liaison prior to the member's return to the group.

Formation

Ongoing formation, both individually and communally, is integral to spiritual growth and maturity and necessary to fully live and experience the Cistercian charism. Formation was a recent focus at both the 2011 International Lay Cistercian Encounter at Dubuque and the OCSO General Chapter in Assisi. Living the Plan of Life with intentionality and sincerity is primary with regard to our formation as Lay Cistercians. The Spencer Lay Community, with the guidance and support of our monk liaison/spiritual guide, continues to develop and implement a curriculum of topics designed to deepen our formation as Lay Cistercians. Topics for study and reflection shall include Cistercian Spirituality, Lay Cistercian Identity, the Rule of Benedict, Contemplative Prayer, Scripture, and Monastic Studies.

Service to the Lay Community

Volunteering to serve the Spencer Lay Community in some ongoing capacity, according to an individual's stage of formation, is encouraged and is a necessary element of the spiritual growth of each member. Service is also a means of honoring one's commitment and responsibility to the Lay Community.

Annual Dues

Dues in the amount of one hundred dollars (\$100.00) per member are payable in January of each calendar year. Members may arrange to make installments in the event of financial hardship. Monies from dues are to be used for the following: travel for CLC delegates and monk liaison to Regional and International Lay Cistercian Meetings; materials, supplies and/or equipment that benefit and support the structure and

function of the CLC; contributions to the *International Association of Lay Cistercian Communities*, and gifts to St. Joseph's Abbey. Monies from dues are held in a separate "CLC" checking account and managed by a designated CLC member, with one other member on the account as co-signer.

- Optional: Restricted donations may be made at any time. The donor must identify the use of the gift (i.e., office supplies, travel for delegates-Regional or International meetings) or other purposes specified by the donor.

Role of the Monastic Liaison/Spiritual Guide

This monk is appointed by the Abbot and, in addition to being present at meetings, may be available to individuals for one-on-one instruction and spiritual direction. This monk also advises the Lay Council, assists with ongoing formation, provides spiritual guidance to the CLC community, and acts as liaison to the monastic community.

Role of the Abbot

The Abbot receives a full, face-to-face Annual House Report of the community by the Lay Council or its representative. This report takes into account the community's growth, progress, challenges, and hopes for the current and coming year. Father Abbot may offer comments or suggestions for consideration by the Lay Council. Due to the autonomous nature of the Lay Community, the Abbot does not become directly involved in decisions. As a courtesy, the Abbot and his Prior receive all email announcements and pertinent communications, as promised at the time of the foundation of the Lay Community in June 2000.

US Regional Meetings

Past meetings were conducted in 1999 and 2007. The purpose of these meetings was to prepare a statement of initiatives to be presented at the 2000 and 2008 International Lay Cistercian Encounter meetings. These statements became integrated into an international document for presentation at the **Order of Cistercian of the Strict Observance (OCSO)** General Chapter meetings for consideration by the Order.

International Lay Cistercian Encounters

These meetings take place every three (3) years and precede the **OCSO** General Chapter meeting. Their purpose is to create a statement from the represented Lay Cistercian Communities throughout the world for presentation to delegates of the Cistercian Order in attendance at the **OCSO** General Chapter meeting. International Lay Cistercian Encounters have taken place in 2000, 2002, 2005, 2008, and 2011. At the May 2011 meeting in Dubuque, Iowa, a permanent association of Lay Cistercian communities was

formally founded, the *International Association of Lay Cistercian Communities*. The *International Association of Lay Cistercian Communities* represents, and acts as a valuable resource for, all recognized Lay Cistercian Communities throughout the world. The *International Association of Lay Cistercian Communities* was formally recognized by the **OCSO** at their General Chapter meeting in Assisi, Italy in September 2011.

International Association of Lay Cistercian Communities Meetings Attendance

A limited number of delegates, typically one or two members from the Lay Council plus monk liaison, are invited by the *International Association of Lay Cistercian Communities*. This invitation is extended to each Lay Cistercian Community for consideration by their Lay Council.