

C. The Process of Formation

C. 26 Members of the Conversi community participate in a structured formation process during which time they explore Cistercian values and practices, and are supported in their efforts to apply these to their lives. We recognize the communal nature of formation, and in this regard support each other through our regular and faithful participation.

St. 26.A Participation in Chats:

Each month, there are four chat sessions (three synchronous and one asynchronous) based on that month's topic. Members must participate in at least one of these chats each month. These sessions are important not only for processing the teachings each month but also for building community; participation benefits the not only the individual, but the whole community as well.

St. 26.A.1 Asynchronous Chats

The asynchronous chat is intended for:

- a) Those members who, from time to time are unable to take part in a regularly scheduled synchronous chat in any particular month,
- b) Those members who due to time constraints, inability to access the web-site, or who are overwhelmed by the speed of interchange on the synchronous chats, cannot meaningfully contribute to the chat.

St. 26.B Topic discussions participation:

Members must make entries in response to the discussion questions each month. These need not be elaborate theological treatises, but we would expect that some thought be given to the topic of the month and that some of those thoughts would be shared with the community. Again, this would be viewed as a pattern of activity over several months.

St. 26.C Journal entries:

Members are expected to make at least one journal entry each month (or respond to another person's entry). Journals are a place to discuss topics/issues beyond the monthly topics; they need not be intimately personal. Both the forum entries and the journal entries are ways that we can learn from each other and encourage each other in our journey. It is important that the whole community participate. This also would be viewed as a pattern of activity over several months.

St. 26.D Expectations of Participation

While there are always exceptions, any member whose pattern of activity over several months is less than what is expected will be contacted via email and asked about their intentions regarding Conversi. If there is no response, a letter will be sent to the member and if the person indicates they cannot meet the requirements, ***or fails to respond***, that person will be dropped from the current active members list for a period of six months. At the end of six months they can apply to be readmitted without prejudice if they so wish.

St. 26.E Voluntary withdrawal of Members

If a member's personal circumstances change and she/he cannot commit themselves to regular participation in the formation process of Conversi they may voluntarily withdraw from active membership for a period of six months without prejudice.

C. 27 The role of the Conversi community in the process of formation is to help each member to assimilate the essential elements of the lay Cistercian way of life.

C. 28 The focus of formation is to develop Cistercian spirituality in individual members. Topics of formation include but are not limited to the following:

Asceticism

Community

Contemplation and prayer
Conversatio morum
Divine Office
Discernment/Commitment
Enclosure/guard of the heart
Formation
Humility
Lectio/Scripture
Obedience
Imitation of Christ
Rule of St. Benedict
Silence and Solitude
Stability
Work as prayer
Simplicity/poverty
Cistercian documents and history
Living the charism in the world
School of Charity

C. 29 The purpose of Conversi is to build a community of people committed to the lay Cistercian way of life.

St. 29.A The Stages of Formation

- Upon entry into Conversi individuals will begin a period of mutual discernment with the community. There is no formal act of commitment at this time. This stage will last for a minimum period of six months, and may last for one year. It will terminate when there is (a) mutual agreement that the person is committed and suited to the

Conversi mode of living the Cistercian charism, or (b) a decision on either side that the person should not be a member of Conversi.

St. 29.A.1 If, after mutual discernment, an individual formally becomes a member of Conversi, that person

- makes a commitment to faithful participation in the continuing formation process. This commitment can be renewed annually for from 3 to 6 years. The purpose of this time is for the member to develop in the Cistercian charism (through the Holy Spirit) over time.
- This initial commitment is posted on the web site, and may become part of the member's on-line profile
- This annual renewal is the result of the ongoing discernment by the member in consultation with the Formation Committee based on a review of the applicant's pattern of fulfilling regular monthly criteria as stated on our website.

St. 29.A.2 At the end of this 3 to 6 year period, and upon completion of the formation program (including all initial formation topics), an individual may apply to become a senior member of Conversi. Upon application, the member will be asked to write a reflection paper under the guidance of the formation committee. The formation committee will then make a recommendation to the Conversi Council, who will decide to accept (or not) the applicant to senior member status. The member will then make a formal commitment for a five year period to faithfully observe all requirements and expectations of a member of the Conversi community. At the end of each five-year period, the member may recommit for a subsequent five-year period. Normally this commitment will take place at the annual retreat; however if this is not feasible, alternative arrangements may be made..

- It needs to be recognized that these commitments are MUTUAL between the individual member and the Conversi community. It is the responsibility

of the Council to ensure that the entire community is involved in this process, particularly those individuals who are active senior members of the community. It is clear that these commitments are in no way juridically binding. Rather members make them as statements of intent regarding their Cistercian lifestyle, values and practices. These statements of commitment are made with the support of the membership of Conversi and the communities of New Melleray and Our Lady of the Mississippi Abbeys.