

Assisi, October 21, 2005

Dear Abbots and Abbesses gathered together at the General Chapter of the Order of Cistercians of the Strict Observance,

Recently the third International Encounter of Lay Cistercians met at Clairvaux. We bring you greetings from the nearly 130 people who were present at that meeting as well as from the 34 international groups represented from around the world.

We wish to thank you for your kind and encouraging reply to our last letter. Indeed, it does seem that "an hour has come in the Order" in which the breath of the Holy Spirit is felt ranging across the world and touching deeply lay people who feel an invitation to the Cistercian Charism. We look forward to the future with great hope—and to our on-going discussion of "how each of us will participate in the same charism". We place ourselves in the hands of the Holy Spirit and ask again for your prayers.

The Encounter at Clairvaux has strengthened our sense of solidarity both among ourselves and within the Cistercian family. We continue to find that much of what we share includes *lectio divina*; individual, communal and liturgical prayer; simplicity of life; *conversatio morum*; interior silence and contemplation, and work as a way to holiness. In addition, we find ourselves and our groups enriched by our devotion to Our Mother Mary, Queen of Citeaux; a growing sense of community among associates; stability in our vocation and to the monasteries with which we are associated; Eucharist as the center of our life as Catholics but in communion with our non-Catholic brothers and sister as well, and our active apostolate in the world.

At the Encounter at Clairvaux, a new Steering Committee was elected and charged with strengthening Lay Cistercian groups around the world as well as establishing a working relationship with the Order as a whole. As with the Lay Cistercians groups themselves, as the international community grows we are confronted with the need for more rather than less structure. We hope to identify as many Lay Cistercian groups as possible around the world, to recognize essential elements within our communities, to discuss those elements in which we differ, and to provide resources for new as well as older Lay Cistercian groups. Our goal at this time is not to give the same shape to all the groups, but to find the foundation that is shared in common by all the Cistercian groups.

At this time, we have identified and are in contact with 44 Lay Cistercian groups around the world. However, we are aware that there are other groups, some just forming as well as some that have been in existence for some time, of which we are unaware. If the Abbots and

Abesseses of the General Chapter have groups associated with their monasteries but which are not listed on our web site (<http://cistercianfamily.org>), we would like to receive information from you so that we may make our list complete.

In order to accomplish our goals, we feel that it would be advantageous, both to the International Lay Cistercians and to the Order as a whole, to establish lines of communication with you. We believe that this could be accomplished if the General Chapter would identify one or two, perhaps a monk and a nun, who would be our liaison with the Order. Initially, the purpose of this link would be to provide communication from and information about the Lay Cistercian groups around the world to the Order as a whole. In addition, as individual groups have often found, input from monks and nuns in our discussions helps us in exploring the manifestation of the Cistercian Charism in the world.

Once again, we would like to thank you for your words of wisdom and encouragement in the past. We are indeed grateful to those monks and nuns from all over the world who sustain us by their prayers and assistance. And we pray in thanksgiving for all the members of Cistercian Houses around the world whose vocation is a source of spiritual strength to the Church and to us.

Fraternally,

The Steering Committee of the International Lay Cistercians

Wayne Bodkin (Aguebelle, France)

Dennis Day (New Melleray, USA)

Alberta Parayre (Villamayor, Spain)

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