

Guidelines for Preparation of Pre-Conference Work

In past International Encounters, Cistercian Lay Communities have developed correspondence to be delivered to the General Chapter by its Steering Committee: in the 1st Encounter at Quito (2000), we asked for a blessing and encouragement; in the 2nd Encounter at Conyers (2002), we asked for a word of wisdom and encouragement; in the 3rd Encounter at Clairvaux (2005), we asked for the appointment of an official liaison from the OCSO. In all cases, we included a short list of Cistercian values and practices that we felt expressed the vocation of the Lay Cistercian living in the world.

At the end of the 4th International Encounter to be held at Huerta in 2008, we would like once again to send a letter to the General Chapter. As explained in the invitation that you have received, we hope that this correspondence will include a "common vision of our Cistercian identity both as individual persons and lay communities as well as of our relationship with a monastic community." The form of this correspondence takes will be a document which will be a synthesis of all of the reflection and work of all the Lay Cistercian communities over the two years leading up to the 4th International Encounter. Unlike previous correspondence to the General Chapter which simply included a list of Cistercian values and practices, this document will contain a much deeper reflection on the essence of our vocation-first as individuals, second as lay communities, and third as communities in a specific and unique relationship with a monastery of the Order. To this end, please consider the following three points:

- Reflect and write a description of what it means for individuals within your Lay Community to live their Cistercian vocation in the world. Do not simply list practices (such as lectio, attending Mass, meditation, the rosary, etc.) and values (such as humility, obedience, patience, silence, etc.) but rather describe why these practices and values are important. Is it possible to live a Cistercian lifestyle in the world?
- Similarly, reflect and write a description of what it means for your members to live their Cistercian vocation together in community. What aspects of community are most important and what contributes most to a sense of one's Cistercian vocation-both when you are together and when you are apart?
- Lastly, reflect and write a description of what it means to be in a spiritual relationship with a Cistercian monastery. What are the characteristics of this relationship-individually and as a group? What works well and what does not work so well?

It is important to remember that this written reflection should include input from as many people from your Lay Community as possible. This includes not only your senior members, but your newer members as well. You may want to identify some time over a span of months to reflect, pray and reflect again on what you hear each other saying about what it means to be a Lay Cistercian.

When you feel you are ready, but no later than September 2007, please write a document that focuses specifically on the members of your community, your Lay Community itself, and your relationship with your monastery. We have deliberately not set a minimum or maximum length for this document-it should be just long enough to communicate accurately who you are to the monks and nuns of the General Chapter.

When you have completed your document, please send it to Dennis Day (English-language representative on the Steering Committee). Your document will be shared with all the other English-speaking Lay Communities and will form the basis of our mutual work during part of the Encounter in Huerta.

Dennis Day
International Steering Committee

Some suggestions for how to proceed:

- Identify one or more persons from your community's leadership or seniors to oversee the development of the document.
 - Ask them to obtain feedback from as many people as possible in your community about the following: (NOTE: Consider using these questions as the basis for a group discussion or distributing them in written form so that individuals can write their own responses.)
 - Why do you believe it is possible to live a Cistercian lifestyle as a layperson? What are some Cistercian values and practices you strive to live in the world? Do not simply list these values and practices, but rather describe how you incorporate them into your lifestyle.
 - What does it mean to belong to your Cistercian Lay Community? What aspects of community are most important to you? How does your community nurture your vocation as a Lay Cistercian? How do you experience a sense of community while physically present with your group, as well as when you are at home?
 - Describe the relationship your community has with your monastery. What impact has this had on you personally, as well as on your Lay Cistercian Community? What have been some of the challenges you feel need to be addressed as Lay Cistercians continue to look to their monastic brothers and sisters for guidance?
- Use the feedback to draft a document to be shared with your community for review prior to submitting the final version.

Send the completed document to Dennis Day at dmday@dayxday.org.