

## **A Survey Relative to the Formation and Transformation of Persons in the Cistercian Charism: Summary**

### **Part One: Background:**

1. In what year did your Lay Community begin meeting?

The oldest group is been meeting 35 years, the youngest 3 years. The average number of years groups have been meeting is 15 years.

2. How many members are in your Lay Community today?

The smallest group has 5 members, the largest 66. The average number of members is 22.

3. Do you have a leadership council or other administrative structure?

yes 14    no 3    na 1

If so, please describe:

14 groups indicated that they had some sort of Council that dealt with issues such as planning, finances (treasurer), records (secretary) and leadership. Some of these indicated that they had monastic input to their Councils.

### **Part Two: Current practices:**

1. On a scale of 1 –10 (with 10 being highest) where would you rate formation as a priority for your Lay Community? 7,7, 10,10,5,7,7,10,10,3,10,8,8,10,10,8,9,5

The average rating of importance is 8.0, with a SD of 2.1. The lowest rating was 3.

2. Does your Lay Community have a specific formation process in place?

14 groups indicate that they have a formation process in place; 4 indicate that they have none

- If yes, who is responsible for decisions about formation topics and methods?

Coordinator (2), Formation committee or Council (6), Monastic (6), Spiritual Director, Written Guidelines, Group Members (2), Vocation Director

- Please provide a brief description of your Lay Community's formation process and the methods used:  
Monthly talks by monastics or group members, written discussion and reflection, face-to-face discussion, group prayer, periods of discernment ranging from two to five years, group retreats, group liturgy including Mass and the Divine Office, division of the group into various levels of development and maturity
- What topics/content areas are covered in your Lay Community's formation program?

Topics mention in the surveys included: asceticism, conversion, enclosure, Lectio, scripture, psalms, stability, Cistercian Charism, community, Divine Office, formation, obedience, the Rule, work, contemplation, prayer, discernment, humility, Imitation of Christ, silence, solitude, simplicity, poverty, Cistercian Fathers, pilgrimage, suffering, Desert Fathers, history of the Order and primitive documents, using the breviary or antiphonal, developing a plan of life, group guidelines and statutes, Marian devotion, conversion, liturgy, sacraments, Canon Law

3. Does your Lay Community distinguish between initial and on-going formation?

Eleven groups indicated that they distinguish between initial and on-going formation and six did not

- If yes, please describe the differences between initial and on-going formation

Essentially the difference between initial and on-going formation is described in terms of acquiring basic tools, resources and information about monastic values and practices and applying these at home versus deeper investigation of topics and greater accountability for those with more experience

4. How does your Lay Community help members translate and apply what they are learning and/or reading about monastic values and practices into their everyday lives?

The following activities were mentioned by one or more respondents: book discussion, face-to-face discussion, mutual support, take-home discussion questions, on-line journaling and discussion including e-mails and chat rooms, observing monastics, regular attendance at meetings (community building), personal sharing, use of mentors, phone conversations, private meetings with one another, support and encouragement from monastics

5. What kinds of formation resources do your Lay Community members use to assist with their formation?

The following resources were mentioned by one or more respondents: books (Cistercian authors, Cistercian Fathers, contemporary authors), the Rule, group prayer and meditation, syllabus of reading assignments, meeting with spiritual director, minutes of monthly meetings, on-line transcripts and audio presentations from monastics, on-line forums, use of the antiphonal, group library, group retreats, audiotapes. One group noted that they have NO resources.

6. Please describe how the monastery with which you are affiliated is involved in providing formation for the members of your Lay Community:

The following types of involvement were mentioned by one or more respondents: suggests topics, monastic sends monthly newsletter, monastic is member of group, praying together (usually parts of the Office), members of the monastic community provide monthly presentations, access to Abbot's/Abbess' Chapter Talks, monastic participation in group Council, private meetings with monastics, annual retreat at the monastery, the group takes lunch with the monastic community, occasional visits and encouragement from the Abbot/Abbess, the monastery provides a place to have meetings.

7. If your Lay Community has formation resources that could be shared with other Lay Communities, please list them here:

Although not many resources were mentioned, a few groups suggested the following: The Exordium (Michael Casey), syllabus of readings, audio tapes and CDs (although permission to distribute these has not been obtained), papers written by Lay Cistercians, Plan of Life document, past newsletters.

8. How do you know if your formation program is effective?

The following observations were mentioned by one or more respondents: number of regularly attending members, surveys and evaluations, "only God knows", participation in meetings, discernment process for making a commitment to the group, longevity of members, observed changes in individuals, personal testimonies, and greater acceptance by monastics.

9. If your Lay Community has a process for enabling members to make Commitments, how do you know if/when a member is ready for such a step?

The following observations were mentioned by one or more respondents: personal discernment with a monastic, successful completion of initial formation, acceptance by the group, formal discernment process, input of mentors, formal application process, observation of openness and willingness to participate, recommendation by a monastic, letter from spiritual director/pastor.

10. What are some of the biggest challenges or difficulties your Lay Community has encountered with regard to formation. You are not limited in the number of topics you list, but please list them in order of importance.

The following observations were mentioned by one or more respondents: formation of new members and integration with older members, group dynamics, multi-lingual members, no organized format of study, getting to know new members, lack of computer skills, some members are willing to share personal thoughts and feelings while others are not, differences in learning styles, distance members must travel to meetings, no monastery in vicinity, difficult to find a place to meet, finding presenters, scheduling, lack of support from the Order, lack of finances, attracting new members, personal communication between members, preparing material for those in on-going formation, shrinking monastic community and lack of local resources.

### **Part Three: Perspectives:**

1. Please list the most important topics you feel need to be covered in a formation program for Lay Cistercians. If possible, list these in order of importance.

The following observations were mentioned by one or more respondents: Cistercian Charism, Lectio, Contemplation and prayer, conversion, imitation of Christ, the psalms and the Divine Office, humility, obedience, work, silence, solitude, Cistercian documents, integrating Cistercian values and practices in the world, Lay Cistercian identity, Marian devotion, charity, commitment, sacraments, Canon Law, doctrines, interpersonal relationships, overview of Cistercian life, lay and monastic history.

2. What do you think are the most practical and effective strategies/methods for providing formation to members of Lay Cistercian Lay Communities:

The following observations were mentioned by one or more respondents: reading and discussing texts, sharing with monastics, continuity of meetings, establish schedule for the day of the meeting, face-to-face discussion, getting to know one another, use of on-line resources, not too much structure, adequate preparation on the part of presenters, community building time, presentations by monastics, attending group meetings, shared liturgy, spiritual guidance, individual contributions to the group, use of mentors, regular retreats, involvement of the monastic community.

### **Part Four: Suggestions**

1. What could be done as a language group or geographical region to strengthen what Lay Cistercian Lay Communities are currently doing to provide formation?

The following observations were mentioned by one or more respondents: exchange ideas and practices, more e-mail contact, joint meetings between groups, have a "formation" conference,

identify criteria for adequate formation resources, have regional meetings on formation, encourage each lay community to develop a web site where resources can be shared, use on-line conferences by monastics, publish an anthology of relevant material for formation along with discussion questions, visit other lay groups.

2. What do you think the Coordinating Committee could do to help meet the formation needs of Lay Cistercian Lay Communities?

The following observations were mentioned by one or more respondents: conduct a survey of formation methods, provide translation of materials, share materials, conduct a "formation" conference, allow the monastics to form Lay Cistercians, standardize the formation process, have a conference on commitment by Lay Cistercians, develop a newsletter, send out CDs, publish an anthology of relevant material for formation along with discussion questions, conduct regional meetings, encourage lay groups to visit one another, encourage monastic communities to invite other lay groups to visit them, and have a big pizza party.

3. Other comments, questions or concerns:

Publish a quarterly magazine with articles from lay Cistercians as well as monastics.