

SPANISH SPEAKING LAY CISTERCIAN COMMUNITIES SYNTHESIS OF A SURVEY RELATIVE TO THE FORMATION AND TRANSFORMATION OF PERSONS IN THE CISTERCIAN CHARISM

Part One: Background:

1. In what year did your Lay Community begin meeting?
2. – **An average of 8,5 years old**

3. How many members are in your Lay Community today?
4. – **An average of 19 members/ community**

5. Do you have a leadership council or other administrative structure?
6. - **7 yes - 2 no**

If so, please describe:

Even though there are differences the most common model is:

- **Coordinator**
- **Secretary**
- **Treasurer**
- **Monk/Nun: link, formation and spiritual guidance**

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? _____

An average of 8, 9

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

8 yes – 1 no

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

The most common answer is:

The monk/nun who is in charged of the formation, together with the coordinator of the community, make a proposal that will be accepted by consensus by all the members of the group

- Please provide a brief description of your Lay Community's formation process and the methods used:

The most common model is:

- Encounters in the monastery every 3 months.
- The monk/nun will give an explanation about the theme that was proposed
- Individual meditation followed by a general discussion and dialogue.
- Oration and Lectio Divina

- What topics/content areas are covered in your Lay Community's formation program?

The most common model is:

- Rule of Saint Benedict
- Holy Bible
- General doctrinal aspects: catechism of the Church, catholic Spirituality.
- Tradition of the Cistercian Fathers & Cistercian Spirituality
- Liturgy and Psalms.
- Ascetic & mystical Literature

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

All answer no but they all have a special care to the new members

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

The most common model is:

The basic themes are given to the new member. After a while he/she will be required to deepen on them, but since the very beginning he/she will share the time of formation with the all community giving to him/her the necessary explanations, in private if required, so that he/she can follow de development of the Encounters easily.

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 are the most common in a majority of groups:

- **The Encounters in the Monastery: Spending time together, sharing sorrows and joys and praying together**
- **Observing monastics**
- **Face to face dialogs and discussions**
- **Praying for one another in the distance**

Sharing personal experiences help to understand, to transform and to incorporate to lay way of living values and cistercian practices.

It is very important because it teaches us to learn to understand the real sense of them and to find out the even though the spiritual sense might be the same the way of “living” can be very different.

The more we tighten the links (bonds) among us the more the beginners advance and the advanced grow in charity.

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

- **The Scriptures**
- **The Rule**
- **Cistercian Fathers texts and books**
- **Catholic Spirituality Synthesis**
- **Catholic Church Catechism**
- **Catholic Church Documents**
- **Christian Fathers & Mothers (San Agustin, San Ambrosio, Santa Teresa etc)**
- **Spirituality books and saints biographies**

- **Monastic life experiences in the monastery**
- **Retreats and oration courses**

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 are the most common in a majority of groups:

Providing a monk/nun for our formation

Feeling us as sons and daughters fruit of their prayer and beneficiaries of it, They are also a live teaching with the example of their lives given to God and their brothers/sisters. Giving us all kind of support and facilities to hold our meetings (retreats, spiritual support and guidance. . .

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

All communities mention formation several resources that are possible to share both as audio tapes or written papers by lay cistercians or spiritual and formation guide. Some have them in their Webs.

Topics:

- **Oration**
- **Silence**
- **Spirituality**
- **The Rule**
- **Bibliography**

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

The following statement is the resume of all the answers:

No kind of test is made, but the own spiritual process of each member in particular and of the whole group in general gives the answer to the affectivity of the formation if it really is a transformation.

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?

Although the all communities have very different degrees of engagements the most common response is:

Individual own criteria, observation and acceptance by the group, discernment by the monastic and/or spiritual guide together with the abbot/abbess.

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 are the most common in a majority of groups:

- **To discover that formation means to know God and to deepen in his Love to be transformed in true Christians and to live the cistercian spirit in our own place in the world.**
- **Difficulty, due to distance from the monastery, to have more meetings per year and the distance among members.**
- **Personal communication between members.**
- **Give continuity to the formation between meetings.**
- **More involvement of the monastic community**
- **No organized format of study.**
- **Geographical distance among members.**
- **The rigorous and continued study. It becomes necessary to study the Cistercian tradition, and to form in all the aspects of the doctrine. Because we stay living in the world and there is a great the “fight” against the errors.**

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.

It has been very difficult to list the topics in order of importance because although the following topics are common to all each community has a different concept of their importance.

- **Cistercian Charism**
- **The Rule**
- **Liturgy of the Hours**
- **Lectio Divina**
- **Oration**
- **Psalms**
- **Monastic and Cistercian history**
- **Cistercian Spirituality**
- **Great faith topics**
- **Bible**
- **Christology**
- **Catechism of the Catholic Church**

- **Vatican II Documents**
- **Mariology**
- **Christian Ethics**
- **History of the Church**
- **Liturgy**
- **Sacraments**

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 are the most common in a majority of groups:

- **Commitment and motivation of Lay Cistercian: Vocation.**
- **Understand formation is a path for live. Conversatio Morum.**
- **Humbly recognize our need of formation**
- **Create among us real links (bonds) of community and communion**
- **involvement of the monastic community**
- **Choose a topic, prepare it and share it in community**
- **Attending retreats, meetings**
- **Relationship with the monastic community**
- **Interpersonal relationship**

Part Four: Suggestions

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

The following are the most common in a majority of groups:

- **Exchange of information and documentation via Internet.**
- **To create a proposal of formative lines and methods (protocol) more unified and than they could mark a common way to facilitate the communion, respecting the freedom of each community**
- **To propose Formative Encounters open to all LC.**
- **To elaborate some subjects, topics that are considered basic.**
- **To promote interchanges between the Cistercian lay communities.**
- **To carry out Regional Conferences**

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

- **To facilitate the dialogue and sharing between lay communities.**
- **To organize International Encounters every three years.**
- **To organize Encounters by Regions (by linguistic groups or geographic zones)**
- **To propose means to tie more the monastic community.**
- **To establish a common protocol of formation as well of contents and ways of “teaching” them**
- **To suggest formative blocks.**
- **To stimulate international encounter and the *communication of goods*.**
- **Announcing interesting and novel contributions periodically in the Web**
- **To canalize different documents and resources contributed by the lay communities and hanging them in the page Web,**
- **To create in this page a space dedicated to the formation in which these documents are deposited.**
- **To qualify a “plank of announcements” in the page to hang the different courses of formation and oration, conferences and activities that are celebrated in the different geographic areas for all those who could be interested.**

3. Other comments, questions or concerns:

- **To simplify questionnaires.**
- **To make clear r that the aim of the formation is the transformation of the person**
- **Do not forget our root and our nature of Schola Caritatis, School of Love: it marks the principle, means and the aim for us .**
- **To propose forms of REVISION OF LIFE, as a formative element of the community.**
- **Although we understand that the formation is essential for the lay maturation and growth of the Cistercian, we think that it does not have to be the same for all.**
- **It would be advisable a periodic publication that gathered all the materials and documents that we mentioned above.**

A community makes an interesting proposal of formative Itinerary¹:

Initiation:

- Sacred Scriptures, mainly the psalms.
- Liturgy, especially the Liturgy of the Hours.
- The Rule.
- Monastic History and monastic spirituality, in particular Cistercian Patrimony.
- Initiation to the oration and lectio.
- Introduction to the Mystery of Christ and Christian Doctrina.
- Cistercian Lay identity.
- Vocation and Christian commitment, promises?, votes?: Sense of a lay life given God.

Deepening and Permanent Formation

- Sacred Scriptures.
- Cistercian Patrimony and Spirituality
- Cistercian Lay identity.
- Bases of Philosophy.
- Bases of Moral and Dogmatic Theology.
- Patrology.
- Liturgy

¹ Adaptation for Lay Cistercian of the proposed formative program for novices in the *Ratio Institutionis* of the Cistercian Congregation of San Bernardo.