



# International Association of Lay Cistercian Communities

To the General Chapters – Assisi 2014

We are very grateful for the invitation and the opportunity that you have given us again to share with you the most important outcomes of the last international encounter of the International Association of Lay Cistercian Communities held at Lourdes earlier this year. We would also like to report on the development of the association since we last met three years ago.

The theme of the last encounter was the Spiritual Journey of the Lay Cistercian Community. This theme was chosen to reflect and make us aware of the incarnation of the lay Cistercian identity in us as individuals and the lay community as a whole. The process to develop the document in response to the coordinating committee's request involved local communities reflecting over a long period of time and writing very moving and rich documents. These texts resulted in a reinterpretation of the history and the journey of the community itself and all of the members that formed it, from looking at all of the events that occurred – difficulties, joys, etc. All of these documents were synthesized into one document for each language group which were worked on at Lourdes and which were ultimately synthesized into a final synthesis that was unanimously adopted.

The other significant outcome of Lourdes was a declaration on lay Cistercian formation which was the result of work begun three years ago in Dubuque. This statement respects the autonomy of individual communities and recognizes the difference between formation, which takes place through on-going conversion of life, and a formation program. It also recognizes the importance of *lectio divina*, the Rule of St. Benedict, Cistercian Patrimony, and the Divine Office to foster lay Cistercian conformation to Christ through the Cistercian Charism. This document concludes with this statement which summarizes the spirit of our formation: It is important to emphasize that formation is furthered within the lay community itself, by the mutual relationship with the monastic community that accompanies them, the example offered by that monastic community, and the co-responsibility of the two communities to be a living expression of the Cistercian charism.

A copy of both of these documents have been given to each of you so that you can have the opportunity to read them.

We would like to provide a brief update of the IALCC since our last visit in 2011. You may recall that the association was formally created in 2011 and membership in it was based on recognition by the monastic community with which a lay community was associated. Requests for recognition were sent to abbots and abbesses by their communities and this is the final result: 9 Spanish-language; 15 French-language; and 23 English-language communities. The requirement for monastic recognition resulted in some communities that

had previously attended international encounters in not joining the international association. We believe this natural selection has been very positive for the association because all of the lay Cistercian communities had to prove to themselves and their monastic community that they possessed the elements that define a lay Cistercian community as agreed upon in Dubuque.

Because recognition by the monastic communities is critical to the long-term relationship between the IALCC and the Cistercian family, we believe it is necessary to confirm the level of recognition for those lay communities that have only provisional recognition or those who were recognized without a vote of the conventual chapter. For that reason, abbots and abbesses with lay communities with the last mentioned status, will receive a new recognition request in the next few months. In the future, we will request a recognition every three years for those communities who continue to have provisional status. We would appreciate if the abbot or abbess notify the IALCC of any concerns regarding continuing membership of a fully recognized lay Cistercian community.

As part of the on-going maturation of the IALCC, statutes to guide the international committee and the association have been drafted. They will be worked on by the lay communities and voted upon in 2017.

The next meeting will be in Spain and will likely be hosted by all of the Spanish-language communities (in the past it was hosted by only one community). The theme will be *The Lay Cistercian Community* and for that we have adopted the words of Tertullian, "See how they love one another."

We do not want to miss the opportunity to give our thanks to the community of Santa Marie du Désert, both monastic and lay, for the great effort and good work in organizing the encounter in Lourdes.

We also want to make a special mention with all our love and gratitude of Dennis Day and Marie-Christine Rossignol, former members of the Coordinating Committee, for their great work and dedication. Both of them have left their mark on the Lay Cistercians.

We also want to say thank you to the General Chapter and Dom Eamon for giving us this time, without forgetting the fundamental help of Dom Armand Veilleux, without whose wise guidance we would never have been able to walk this path.

Finally, a special thank to the abbots and abbesses, the monks and nuns, who make possible our vocation and help us to keep going on our path to transformation to Christ through the Cistercian charism.

We will be glad to answer any questions.

Many thanks.