

## MILESTONES OF PROGRESS Ave Maria Lay Cistercians

The lay Cistercian community of Ave Maria is just four years old. In September, 2009, a married couple who had spent time at Holy Spirit Monastery, and were attracted by the charism of that monastery, asked a lay Cistercian who had recently moved to Ave Maria, Florida, USA, to begin a lay Cistercian group there.

The group currently consists of:

- 4 seniors who are in lifetime promises
- 2 juniors who are in second year promises
- 6 members in formation
- And approximately 12 observers.

This town of Ave Maria, Florida, is the only Catholic city in the USA to our knowledge. There is a deep spiritual atmosphere here which entices God-seeking individuals. Since our beginning, the growth of new members has been at a pace which allows us to facilitate teachings on an intimate level. Our group meets one day per month only two miles from the magnificent oratory, and the campus of Ave Maria University, and the group senses that we are on holy ground.

## CHALLENGES

1. Since our group is small, we do not yet have enough lifetime-promised members to serve on a board. This situation will be addressed as members continue in the five year program and make promises.
2. There are members of other lay Cistercian groups in the geographical area who seek to join our group. Fr. Anthony Delisi of Holy Spirit Monastery in Conyers, Georgia, USA, the monastery under which we are formed, has addressed this issue with our community and it has been determined that prospective members will have to start at the very beginning of the process to join our community so they are given specific structure and formation.
3. Because some members come from great distances (300 plus miles), have school age children in the home, or have issues with too little vacation time or money, some members can not attend the required annual retreat at Holy Spirit Monastery. Local weekend retreats do not offer the Cistercian spirit so evident among the monastic community which is 700 miles away.
4. Formerly, first time and lifetime promises have always been professed at the annual retreat at HSM. We must discern if God would accept a change in this tradition because of challenge #3 above.
5. Our community has no monastic serving as advisor or monthly mentor. We need to figure out how to use the material on cd's from conferences and previous retreats to strengthen our spirituality. We invite local Cistercian clergy to address our group when possible.

## RESOURCES TO FACE CRISES

1. There are four lay Cistercians with ten years experience each who transferred from an older lay Cistercian community, and are able to add their experiences to help in the development of this new community.
2. The adoption of the 5 year formation program from Holy Spirit Monastery (compared to the 3 year program at the original community) has added structure and strength to our program. Seniors especially felt more equipped to teach, live the charisms more deeply, and carry on the specific tradition that our community observes from the monastics and lay Cistercians at HSM.

## CONTINUOUS CONVERSION, FORMATION, AND SPIRITUAL GROWTH

1. In between our monthly meetings, we use books, tapes and cd's from past retreats to help in our interior focus on the Rule of Benedict, and seeking God.
2. During our monthly meeting, seniors meet two hours earlier than the general community to pray lauds together and to discuss a yearly book and answer syllabus questions. At lunch, which is open to all, we pray midday prayer as a community giving all members the opportunity to become familiar with divine office format. Members take turns as invitatrix, cantor I, cantor II, and hebdomedary. After a reading from the Rule, and a conference, we break into small groups according to year of entry.
3. Our seniors in lifetime promises never did juniorate formation, so now are doing this with the members in yearly promises. We offer short talks on every day life using the guideposts of the Rule, a m and p m Psalms, adapted for use of families in their homes. Our subject matter covers the Beatitudes, Cistercian charisms, and the gospels. Each meeting includes lectio divina, quiet time, snack time and optional vespers held in the oratory at Ave Maria.
4. Many members of the community live at Ave Maria so they have the opportunity to encounter each other at daily Mass, Eucharistic adoration, or food shopping at the local grocery store. These meetings strengthen our bonds of charity and faith.