

## **LAY CISTERCIAN IDENTITY**

This is the final synthesis extracted from three previous syntheses from Lay Cistercian communities (English, French, Spanish) and finalized at S.M. Huerta, Spain, on June 6, 2008.

### **1. Lay Cistercian Vocation**

As individuals, we recognize a personal call that is experienced in community as a gift from God. We define it as a call to be an active witness of Christ and his Church in the midst of the world, providing a prayerful and contemplative testimony in a life defined by the values of the Cistercian charism. This life is guided by the Rule of Saint Benedict as a concrete way to interpret the Gospel, and by our Cistercian Fathers and Mothers. This personal call is a means of continuous conversion, one that leads to a rediscovery and deepening of the grace of our baptism and the development of an adult faith.

### **2. Lay Cistercian Life**

2.1 We are convinced that it is possible to adapt Cistercian spirituality to the lifestyle of a lay person though it is very clear that there are two different ways to live it, monastic and lay, and both are complementary. This shows us the vitality of the monastic life. Lay people have found in Cistercian spirituality a way to live in the world with greater commitment and spiritual depth. We are unanimous in our belief that the Cistercian charism can be lived outside the monastery.

2.2 There are many ways to live the Cistercian Lay life – but although the forms may be different all have only one aim: “to seek God”.

2.3 All the Cistercian values and practices, which are a means of liberation and internal conversion, can be incorporated in the life of laypersons:

Prayer and praise  
Confidence and abandonment to God  
Humility

Obedience  
Poverty  
Chastity

Austerity  
Simplicity of life  
A balanced life

Silence and solitude  
Work  
Hospitality and service

Stability  
Simplicity  
Joy

2.4 This interior unification, this way of conversion, this desire for incarnation, is born and is realized in the choice of “preferring nothing to Christ” (RB 72), living in the world without being of the world (cf. John 17, 9-16).

2.5 We experience an inner and outer transformation (*conversatio morum*) which can be observed in the frequent reception of the sacraments, having the Eucharist as the center of our lives; the prayerful study of Scripture through *Lectio Divina*; fidelity to the Divine Office; filial devotion to the Virgin Mary; hospitality with our brothers and sisters; a change of priorities; a new way of ordering the day; a new way of loving others through the Love of God; the desire for formation and the necessity of spiritual guidance, and the experience of work as collaboration in the building of the Kingdom of God without our personal enrichment as our goal.

2.6 The coenobitic dimension of our Lay Cistercian life finds expression in our life in the spiritual union we experience with all the members of our lay community as well as with the monastic community. A more ascetic life allows us to be united in personal and liturgical prayer, as well as in work, despite being physically apart.

2.7 Our Mission as Lay Cistercians is realized through a life of witness, independent of whether we participate in pastoral and/or social activities. The fundamental element of our life is in finding balance between times of prayer and action.

### **3. Lay Cistercian Community**

3.1. The experience of community is described as the birth of a new family which gives us aid and strength to live a commitment to Christian life without fear and with hope. We believe that praying together creates communion which unites us over distance and fortifies us as well. We believe that the greater bond is to be united by the Holy Spirit in a common search: the search for God. Consequently the community provides a personal enrichment through the transmission of values among all its members. Our discovery of community helps us experience ourselves as the Body of Christ. To experience the needs of others encourages charity and teaches humility. The community is a God-given means to our sanctification.

3.2. For a majority of communities, it is fundamental to formalize our chosen lifestyle with some type of personal commitment, made in front of both communities, lay and monastic, that gives voice to the desire and personal decision to respond to the call of God to this specific Lay Cistercian vocation.

3.3. There is great diversity in the way that communities organize themselves. In some communities we can say that there is a reluctance to create structures.

#### **4. Bond with the Monastery and the Cistercian family**

4.1. The monastic community is the heir of the Cistercian charism in its present form. Lay Cistercian communities, through their communion with a monastic community, receive light and formation from the monks and nuns. However, there are differences concerning the concrete bonds of union and the ways to describe these bonds.

4.2. We experience the two communities, monastic and lay, as a single family with different expressions of life. However, all are clearly aware of the difference between being lay and being monastic.

4.3. For all the groups, it is the monastic community, represented by the Abbot (Abbess), that recognizes in them the charism and confers on them their membership in the Cistercian family, according to the nature of the bonds that unite them.

4.4. It is common to all our communities and members to experience the monastery as our home and a place where the Lord unites, in a very special way, both communities, lay and monastic, and the members of both to each other. The hospitality of the monks and nuns makes the love of God present.

4.5 Being Lay Cistercians does not confer on us privileges in our relationship with the monastic community, but makes us aware of our duties and responsibilities.

4.6. Our Lay communities have, with different frequencies, meetings in the monastery in which we receive formation and learn to love one another in a new form of relationship centered on Christ, to which all the members have been chosen and called by God.

4.7. Monastics and laypersons learn fraternal life from one another, persevering together on the path to holiness.

4.8 Many members of lay communities go to the monastery individually. But all agree that in order to be Lay Cistercian it is not enough to

simply feel attracted to a monastery, but that it is necessary to belong to a lay community.

## **5. Epilogue**

5.1 We believe that Lay Cistercian communities are a work of the Holy Spirit, and, with little communication among ourselves, we have striven to live and experience the Cistercian charism in total communion. We believe that in the lives of Lay Cistercians, by the grace of God, the Cistercian charism that has been exclusively monastic for nine hundred years has found a new expression.

5.2 There exists in all Lay Cistercian communities the desire to respect and maintain diversity in all things that do not break the communion: to live the same charism with all the diversity of expressions while being strongly united in what is essential.

**Called and transformed by Christ**

**Maria ! ---- Rabbouni !**