

# **“Look how they love each other”**

## **I. Cistercian lay community:**

### **1. Nature and Purpose**

That we form community is the desire of Jesus himself for all of us who want to follow him.

A Community of Lay Cistercians brings together baptized men and women who seek God through the Cistercian charism. The attraction to a particular monastery brings us together and makes us part of a family.

Community is a grace by which the Holy Spirit unites us as a family, with Christ at the center. The members sacrifice their own will in favor of the common good.

Community is for us a privileged place to journey together, respecting each one’s rhythm. It is a true school of charity, a process of ongoing conversion, and a search for holiness in our daily lives and in the world. With our personal and community life we will be witnesses to the love of God and it could be said of us, "Look how they love one another."

One characteristic of our lay Cistercian communities is that we do not live together. This does not present an impediment; on the contrary, it is a great opportunity to deepen the challenge of being a spiritual community.

The greater the appreciation for prayer, work, and fraternal charity, the less we are disturbed by the differences in personalities, decision-making processes or spiritual practices.

Putting Jesus at the center of our lives causes us to grow in freedom, generosity and fraternal love. Whenever we are faithful to these values, we are building our community in spite of any type of distance.

In the Cistercian context, the call to communion with God manifests itself in the community and promotes unification, both personal and between members.

### **2. Mutual Responsibility**

#### **a) Among ourselves**

For us to be mutually responsible within the community of Lay Cistercians is to listen (RB), to help and care for one another, encouraging each one to live their commitment, to walk together, to pray for one another. The Rule of St Benedict is an essential guide for our lives.

We exercise mutual responsibility in the life of our lay community: by fulfilling the commitment to what is agreed upon, by our active presence at scheduled meetings, by making our contribution, bringing our ideas and by accepting ourselves as we are.

In living our commitment, we are not only responsible for ourselves, but also for others in the sight of God. Through our witness we encourage each other in our journey in faith.

Following the example of the monastic community, we seek to exercise a collegial form of authority, even if there are elected leaders.

The development of a Charter can be a good way to define the responsibilities of each one, at both personal and community levels.

### **b) With the monastic community**

What must be prevalent in the relationship between lay and monastic communities is the balance between the bonds of companionship and autonomy. This, of course, requires mutual understanding.

The shared responsibility between monastic and lay communities is reflected in the requirement of an association with a particular monastery and the presence of the monastic liaison in the group. Knowing that the way we live the Cistercian charism is recognized and encouraged by the monastic community commits us to seek together new ways to embody this charism.

The role of the monk or nun who is the monastic liaison is of utmost importance within the lay community.

## **II. Communication: a relationship of love**

Community life is a life in relationship, based on communication among its members.

Any type of communication must have a foundation of love. Love is seeking the good of the other for the sake of the other (Pope John Paul II). Christian communication is never between two, it is among three – the one who transmits, the one who receives and the Holy Spirit who enlightens.

Communication between members of a community manifests itself as much through silence as through the word, provided that these are lived with respect, benevolence and reciprocity. To respect the silence of the other(s) is to care for them. What must prevail between us is love! Important occasions, as well as work done together, shape our community and establish strong bonds.

We recognize our International Association as a means to facilitate community, mutual responsibility and communication.

The language-commission, regional, and international meetings are experienced as a way to improve the vitality of our communities.

Lay communities are nourished by close spiritual bonds and frequent communication with the monastery with which they are associated. Monastic advisors provide spiritual and institutional guidance as we seek to translate the Cistercian charism into our lives as lay Cistercians. Each community commits itself to open and honest communication among its members and between the community and its associated monastery. In addition, lay communities commit themselves to open and honest communication among themselves within the IALCC.

A simple and efficient channel of communication, which respects the two vocations, and does not disturb the monastic life itself, should be established.

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