

## MARTYR TEXT FOR THE MEETING ON THE STAGES OF THE SPIRITUAL JOURNEY

This document is an attempt to bring together the main characteristics of the three syntheses, English, Spanish and French, on the spiritual journey of Lay Associates to Cistercian Monasteries. (EN = English; SP = Spanish; FR = French)

Texts from 37 communities were used: 15 out of 23 English Lay Cistercian Communities, all 9 Spanish LCCs, and 13 out of 15 French LCCs.

LCCs have **all** worked **as a community** on what was asked by the International Committee:

In the Introduction of our document on Lay Cistercian Identity (1.1) we state, "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."

This phrase offers us a good introduction to one of the main goals of our Lourdes 2014 Meeting: "**Our spiritual journey in the light of the Cistercian charism.**"

Could your lay Cistercian community reflect on the milestones and stages that have marked the rhythm of your progress? How has your community been able to overcome periods of crisis? The 2014 Meeting offers us the opportunity to benefit greatly from sharing all these considerations.

With this goal we ask you to write your **common experiences (not individual) of your lay Cistercian way** –difficulties, benefits, resources to face crises, evolution, light (easy) and dark (difficult) times. In summary, all which makes it possible to incarnate the lay Cistercian life in the world.

To assist, it may be important to refer to:

1. the lay Cistercian document adopted unanimously in Huerta (2008)
2. the ILC statutes adopted in Dubuque (2011)
3. as well as the work on formation that was started in Dubuque and which will continue with this encounter.

In all three cases, the reflection was accompanied by a **review of the life of the group**. For all the groups, it was the opportunity to explore more deeply the paths that led them to where they are today. Note, however, that the three syntheses used the results of this review differently. Thus, the English and Spanish syntheses appear not to have considered this review as part of their spiritual journey, as if it were just a preliminary stage, but "external" to the journey itself:

*"It is important to highlight that virtually all lay communities, before starting their reflection on the spiritual journey, reviewed that journey. In this synthesis, we do not repeat this historic part. Instead, we focus on the spiritual journey as fruit of this review." (SP)*

*"Importantly, virtually all lay communities, before entering the reflection on the spiritual path, have made a reflection of their journey. This historical part will not be collected in this synthesis as the Spiritual Path is our focus as a result of this journey. It should also be noted that all the work has been done communally, so the result is the sum of the Spiritual Path of each of the members of the Lay Cistercian Communities." (EN)*

On the opposite, in their synthesis, the French believed this review of life should be considered an essential and indispensable part of the spiritual journey itself:

*"All engaged into a review. It was for them an opportunity to deepen the paths that led these people who did not choose each other, but are united by the same desire. They discerned in it an intervention of the Spirit. This review is, in itself, an essential component of their spiritual journey."* (FR)

But regardless of this difference of perspective, the remainder of this synthesis will show that there are nevertheless many common features to the three language groups.

### **Preparation of the Martyr Text**

To write their report, the English and Spanish syntheses focused on the ILC Identity document. They thus followed a strictly identical structure (probably influenced by the formulation of the request). Their report is in four parts, corresponding to the four sections of the document adopted at Huerta (vocation, life, community and bonds).

However, to write this final text, we preferred to follow the plan adopted by the French synthesis. It has the advantage of trying to integrate the issue of "progress" within a dynamism, a journey in three stages:

- 1) A **starting point**
- 2) A **path** that requires food, know-how, guidance
- 3) A **goal**, an **aim**, an **outcome**

#### **1. A beginning: awareness of a spiritual life**

All emphasize an essential first step: the encounter with a monastic community, bringing to light the existence of an inner life.

*"All agree that [the starting point] was a call to what the monastery represented: a haven of peace and, above all, [the place] of a renewed meeting (reencuentro) with God. The silence, beauty, and prayer experienced in the liturgy of the hours were a great discovery. It was possible to approach the Almighty from a new and at the same time so ancient perspective!"* (SP)

*"Men and women have described the initial seeds of their vocation as Lay Cistercians as a "quiet and humble response" to the prompting of the Holy Spirit which led them to seek out resources and opportunities for strengthening their own spiritual growth."* (EN)

*"Many point out an event, an awakening, revealing an awareness of an "inner life." In all cases, this awakening is experienced when meeting, seeing, and discovering a Cistercian monastic community."* (FR)

The major features of this initial stage can be summarized as:

- Awareness of an inner life
- Revealed by the vision a prayer-centered life
- Recognizing the intervention of the Holy Spirit
- Awakening a reciprocity

*"We noticed there was a real longing for more spirituality in our daily life and for sharing this longing with others." This yearning did not escape the notice of monks and nuns in the order and thanks to their generous response" (EN)*

But this awareness of the existence of an inner life takes a very specific form: it is ***the discovery that we are capable of God.***

*"At the time, many of us felt surprised to experience such a desire, but the sincere desire to meet God was bigger than our fears and our ignorance (desconocimiento). We all agree that the experience exceeded all our expectations!" (SP)*

Here, the three documents clearly refer to their **Cistercian Lay Vocation** as it was reflected upon at the Huerta Meeting.

All are also unanimous to highlight the **very incarnated character** of the spiritual life they discover. This capability is incarnated in the persons who experience this call, as well as in the bonds created with the Monastery. There is constant reference to concrete life experiences.

*"This capability of God does not stray into disembodied spirituality." (FR)*

*"At the same time they were discovering others like them who have shared the same yearning. As one person remarked, the Lay Cistercian Vocation began to take shape as small groups of men and women from diverse backgrounds gathered together to be supported in their attempts to apply monastic values and practices to their lives outside the monastery." (EN)*

*"We cannot, nor do we want to, imagine our lives without our Lay Cistercian community or our monastic community!" (SP)*

All emphasize the **transformations** brought in their lives through this discovery:

*"Evolution-transformation that makes us think" (FR).*

*"They discover that they have found a spiritual home when they become members of Lay Cistercian communities and begin to make important changes in their lives as Christians." (EN)*

*"We came as children, willingly taught to try to integrate the Cistercian values in our lives" (SP).*

## **2. The choice of means to incarnate this capability of God**

The three syntheses show a very similar search to give life to the capability of God they discover in themselves, after their encounter with a monastic community:

*"It is an ongoing challenge to make sure that we all focus on the application of the charism to life outside the monastery and not allow the focus to become theoretical." (EN)*

The English and Spanish syntheses explain this in great detail in the sections entitled 'Cistercian life', 'the Lay Cistercian community', as well as in the chapter on formation. The Spanish text emphasizes the Cistercian values to be integrated into their lives.

Two points need to be developed here: the role of community and the importance of formation.

A. **A central place is given to the community**, both monastic and lay, as a means of spiritual growth.

*"Discovering the hand of God in the building up of our community was also something surprising. None of us has been called "by man": we all got to the monastery individually and for no apparent reason. But coming here, we all heard and acknowledged that God Himself was calling us, summoning us, and gathering us. We are all very different from the diversity of our family, work and social situations, or age. We did not know each other before, and humanly speaking, we know each other still very little. However, a new feeling has united us: the call to the same vocation." (SP)*

*"Walking with others is a wealth, as we experience the sharing and communion as a source of help and happiness. But there are also requirements (such as learning to follow the pace of the other), wounds, sometimes even suffering. All agree in recognizing the communal nature of their journey as essential and unavoidable." (FR)*

*"Not only do Lay Cistercians come together to learn from the monks and nuns, they are also learning from one another as they share their insights and experiences about what it means to apply Cistercian values and practices to everyday life outside the monastery." (EN)*

*"It is not only that they (the monks and nuns) consented to be part of the journey from the beginning; they have gone on to embrace the venture, and to model for us, in their deep hospitality to us, the spirit which we must live out in the world." (EN)*

*"It is impossible to imagine our journey without the support and guidance of the monastic community. They are our point of reference. The monastic community is our foster mother and our teacher." (SP)*

*"The Monastery is the starting point, the place of origin, and all the communities introduce the concept of stability in the commitment that binds them to the Monastery. This stability is entirely at the service of the maturation of the members as well as of the groups." (FR)*

The difficulties encountered everywhere are never considered only as obstacles, but also as a means of spiritual growth, which is made possible by grace and brotherly support.

B. **Formation**

With some minor variations, the three texts emphasize **the importance of formation at the service of spiritual growth**. Regardless of the formative nature of the community itself, the following elements are recognized as necessary:

- the practice of lectio
- the knowledge of the Cistercian literary treasure
- the Rule of St Benedict
- the central place of the Eucharist and the use of the sacraments.

In the area of formation, note the emphasis on two specific points:

- **The annual retreat:**

*"Times of retreat helped to strength the bonds between the members of the group. They also offered us moments of more intense prayer and intimacy with the Lord. All this has proved rich in meaning: it renews our spiritual life and gives us light and strength to keep moving forward."* (SP)

*"The annual retreat highlights the importance of a spiritual community experience, "lived as provisions for the journey" and where "one can breathe more deeply".* (FR)

- **The importance of silence:**

*"It is not empty. It is emphasized as indispensable. It can have an ascetic and thus structuring character."* (FR)

*"In addition, some groups spend time in silent meditation"* (EN)

### **3. The aim: Life in Christ**

It is clearly explained in the Spanish and French syntheses:

*"Our greatest hope: that this gift may be for all of us a synonym to the path of holiness, so that our community can continue in heaven and become the communion of saints."* (SP)

*"A quest for the encounter with Christ that surpasses us and abides in us. A discovery of friendship: "Whoever takes a liking in the other probably discovers a bit of the savour of the utterly Other" (Pascal Marin, o.p.)"* (FR)

The English synthesis says the same thing:

*"Our group is characterized by a quiet and heartfelt loyalty to each other, supportive of each other in sickness or problems, we cannot look to any major crises or extremes of darkness or light but to a gradual, evolution of growth in the spirituality of the members. We are grateful for the fellowship with each other, spiritual nourishment and the generosity of the Abbot who gives his time and wisdom to the group. From this we find the resources and grace to face the difficulties of life and to follow God's providence in all things."*

### **Conclusion**

After reflecting on their identity and working on their formation, LCCs tried to go to the heart and source of these two realities. There, they discovered an encounter, with Jesus Christ.

Starting point and goal of their journey, He calls them through brothers and sisters, to be witnesses of His Gospel in the world, enlightened and supported by the Cistercian tradition embodied in the Nuns and Monks who accompany them.

*"For with you is the fountain of life; in your light do we see light."*

*Psalm 36*