



# International Association of Lay Cistercian Communities

OCSO General Chapter – Assisi 2017

Dear abbots and abbesses, dear Abbot General, first, thank you for inviting us and dedicating this time to listening to us. We know that, although our time is brief, it is significant when we are included in the busy schedule of a General Chapter. For us it has great value because it confirms that Cistercian lay people are part of the great Cistercian Family.

This is the 6th time (2002 to 2017) that Cistercian laity have been invited to the OCSO General Chapter and given the privilege of being able to address a few words to the abbots and abbesses gathered here. This means that it is already 15 years since the General Chapter first recognized our lay vocation and spiritual journey as indivisibly united to the Cistercian charism.

In these years, we have been slowly moving forward, (allowing things to simmer, as in a good kitchen). During this time, we have been drafting a series of documents, some to better understand the call that we have received from God, others to build and organize our International Association of Lay Cistercian Communities. Our inspiration has always been Cistercian history.

We are going to briefly list these documents, worked on by all the communities and voted on in the International Meetings that we hold every three years.

#### Spiritual Documents:

- Lay Cistercian Identity
- Characteristics of Lay Cistercian Communities
- The Lay Cistercian Spiritual Journey
- Declaration on Formation

#### Organizational Documents:

- Bonds of Charity (2008 ad experimentum; 2011 ratified)
- Statute of Membership (annulled by the Statutes)

In each of our previous invitations to the General Chapter we have shared these documents with all of you, because we think they are the best way to describe our evolution. This has brought us to where we are now.

At our last International Meeting, held in Ávila in June, we generated two new documents: an important and beautiful document on the meaning of Community in Lay Cistercian life, and our first statutes. The latter is not spiritual, but they are necessary to regulate the functioning of the

Association and to clarify the tasks and responsibilities of the Coordinating Committee (in no case to regulate the functioning of any individual lay communities).

Both documents have been provided to you so that you can have the opportunity to read them.

We think that it is important to point out that, although there have been long discussions and much reflection during the drafting of all the documents, all have been unanimously approved, which gives them still greater importance and are a sign of communion in the same vocation.

The association represents about 50 communities around the world, associated with monasteries belonging to four branches of the Cistercian Family: OCSO, OCist, Congregation of St. Bernard and Bernardines d'Esquermes.

We are aware that our vocation is linked to the monasteries to which we are associated, that is, without the support, the recognition, the teachings, the acceptance. . . in short, without the generosity of the monastic communities that welcome us, our vocation would not be feasible. And that is why we feel deeply grateful.

During all these years we have had the invaluable help of Dom Armand. Every time we have had difficulties, doubts, conflicts or the need for advice, he has been able to guide us in a practical and wise way (and with a great sense of humor), helping us precisely to find answers in the history of Cistercians and not in the mundane way of solving situations. We also want to thank Pascal for his great work during the three years he has been a member of the Committee. At the same time that we welcome Jacques as representative of the French-speaking communities

At no time do we think that we have reached a goal, on the contrary, we know that we are in our beginnings. We are also aware that we are putting the first stones on the foundation of a construction that only God knows how much to grow and the time that has to prevail. What we do know is that the present in which we live and the future we envision are difficult times at all levels, times full of challenges in which we will have to face very complex situations both politically and socially and at the level of our own monastic communities to which we are associated, many of them very old and without the renewal of new vocations. We are realistic but full of hope, because we trust God who in every moment of the history of humanity has been the one who has led the initiative showing the way forward.

We cannot end without asking you to keep us very much in your prayers. We will need all possible help so that the Lay Cistercians know how to bring to this world a determined and courageous Christian witness based on the values proper to our charism.

We will be glad to answer any questions.

Many thanks.