

## INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF LAY CISTERCIAN COMMUNITIES

### House Report 2022

1) Name of lay community: **Associates of Southern Star Abbey**

2) Contact person: Mike Stone

3) Date group was established: 2002

4) Number of members: 38

5) Monastic liaison: Fr Nicho Verkley (Superior)

6) Date of adoption of the Lay Cistercian identity document: 2009

7) Charter and Statutes:

(A) The monastic community has formally recognised the Associate Community as described in these terms:

“The Associates of Southern Star Abbey Kopua are:

- a community of Christians, both lay and ordained,
- centred on the Cistercian monastic community at Kopua,
- seeking to live the Cistercian charism outside monastic enclosure.

They find their identity within the ‘Lay Cistercian Identity’ document adopted at the International Lay Cistercian Encounter 2008.

“They seek to:

- shape their lives by the values enshrined within the Benedictine-Cistercian vows of stability, conversion of life, and obedience;
- live a balanced lifestyle combining prayer, reflection, work, and recreation;
- live out in their own circumstances the values of community, solitude, simplicity and hospitality;
- embody the Cistercian charism as lovers of their families and local communities, and as lovers of the place in which they live.

“The Relationship of the Associate Community to the Monastic Community is one of partnership in a bond of charity and mutual prayer. Within that bond,

- Associates and monastics each have their own form of community life;
- the community of Associates receives its Cistercian identity through the monastic community, which has the responsibility of discerning, fostering and safeguarding the Cistercian charism;
- the Associate community is led and resourced by a leadership team comprising the Abbot (or a monk appointed by him); a coordinator and four elected members.

(B) The Leadership Team has recently updated " The Handbook of the Cistercian Associates of Southern Star Abbey, Kopua 2022"

8) Leadership Team: There is a National Coordinator, appointed by the Abbot, and four associates elected at the three-yearly chapter.

9) Formation program : We have three documents, created by a group of Associates and approved by the Abbot, which are the basis of our formation. They are: *Basic Rationale for Lay Cistercian Formation* (see below) ; *The Stages of Formation for Kopua Associates* (see below) ; and a longer *Formation Guide* (not included here).

## **“BASIC RATIONALE FOR LAY CISTERCIAN FORMATION**

**December 2012**

*Based on the discussions before and during the International Lay Cistercian Encounter at Dubuque, USA, in 2011*

### **1. The Responsibility for Formation**

- Each autonomous Lay Community is itself the collective mentor of its members, who also individually share responsibility for their own and each other’s continuing formation;
- That monastic community to which each Lay Community is linked, and from which it receives its recognition, has a role of advice, resource and possible admonition, primarily through its appointed liaison monastic;
- Lay Communities can assist one another by the sharing of encouragement, experience, learnings, and resources, either directly or through the International Association as an intermediary.

### **2. The principles of formation**

The formation of Associates is a life-long process integrally related to the monastic vow of *conversatio morum*. In this process, the Holy Spirit is **the** Formator, working through the following elements in the context of each autonomous community:

- Modelling and mutual accountability in living the Cistercian charism;
- The fostering of relationships which include immersion in a specific monastery and in its Lay Community;
- Ever-deepening prayer and worship in the bond of charity;
- The use of authentic Cistercian resources and mentors;
- The recognition of the importance of discernment within a two or three stage formation process responding flexibly to the diversity of local and personal situations;
- The combination of the imparting of knowledge (*scientia*) with actual experience and wise reflection (*sapientia*).

The aim of this process is both growth into Cistercian identity and conformation to Christ. For those called to be Lay Cistercians, the Cistercian charism is a primary way they are conformed to Christ.

### **3. The major resources**

- The Rule of Benedict;
- Cistercian spirituality as modelled by the monks and nuns of the Order(s), and in the lived experience of Associates;
- The Lay Cistercian Identity Document adopted at Huerta in 2008;
- Authentic Cistercian mentors, on both sides of the grave;
- *Ratio Institutionis*: Guidelines on [monastic] Formation (approved by the OCSO General Chapters of 1990).

### **4. Content**

Optimum subjects for instruction, discussion and practical reflection include:

- The Rule of Benedict and its application in every day life;
- Introduction to Lectio Divina, especially on Scripture;
- The meaning and practice of the Liturgy of the Hours;
- Cistercian spirituality texts, both traditional and contemporary;
- The cultivation of a contemplative life-style, disciplined by a personal Rule of Life.

From Ratio (OCSO)

12. A community's ability to form new members depends largely on its having a unified spirit so that it can impart a single orientation to the upcoming generations. Where unity is lacking, difficulties are created for those entrusted with the task of formation. The community should therefore work towards a unified approach that is founded on a common patrimony treasured by all, so that practical everyday questions can be located within a shared vision of the Cistercian ideal. This vision must be one that is rooted in the experience of monastic living and which spans the several generations which together form the community.

C. 45.3; ST.49.1.B.

## **“THE STAGES OF FORMATION FOR KOPUA ASSOCIATES**

**December 2012**

### ***Inquirers***

People inquiring about becoming an Associate of Kopua come from very diverse backgrounds and spiritual journeys. Their spiritual formation has already begun, long before. The Holy Spirit may now be leading them into the Cistercian charism, or their inquiry may simply be part of a search for their particular spiritual identity in Christ, a search which will lead them elsewhere. Discernment is required both at this stage of inquiry and during the intentional preliminary formation stage which may follow inquiry.

Three elements are necessary before the intentional **preliminary formation stage** is entered:

- committed membership of a Christian church
- an actual encounter with the Cistercian monastic community life at Kopua
- contact with the coordinator of the national Associate Community.

The Coordinator enters into discussions with the inquirer about whether or not he or she is being called to live the Cistercian charism as an Associate of the Abbey. This exploration is private and unstructured, extending over an indefinite period at the discretion of both inquirer and Coordinator. At the end of this, the Coordinator may invite the inquirer to participate in the intentional **preliminary formation stage**.

Inquirers receive the Newsletter distributed to Associates and friends of the Abbey, and are welcome to participate in Associate study courses.

### **The preliminary formation stage**

The purpose of this stage is to acquaint an inquirer with basic Cistercian spirituality and identity, incorporate him or her into relationships with the Associate community and the monastic community, and mutually discern God’s leading.

The stage normally lasts about eighteen months, though there is flexibility. For most, it will begin at the end of a calendar year, after communication with the Coordinator who also names them in the Associates Newsletter.

It involves **mentoring, study, and the shaping of a personal Rule of Life** which will support the living of Cistercian values.

**Formation in the charism** is primarily in the hands of the Coordinator, but also comes through the fellowship of the Kopua *whanau*, in many and diverse ways.

**Study:** the content of this will vary for each individual, according to the previous familiarity of the candidate with these necessary themes:

- the Rule of Benedict (with the aid of a recommended commentary)
- the Cistercian tradition
- Lectio Divina
- The Hours of Prayer
- Contemplative life-style, drawing especially on the document *Toward the Formation of Kopua Associates*
- Completion of the study course on 'Stability' is required for all candidates.

The Associate Community through its Coordinator makes study courses and other material available.

**Shaping of a personal Rule of Life:** this is developed in consultation with the Coordinator. It builds on the themes of the study, and especially on 'contemplative life-style'. It seeks to be specific about "when's" and "where's" and "how's", yet simple, flexible and achievable.

**Relationships to Associates and the Associate Community:** People in Preliminary Formation are encouraged to participate in Associate Retreats, and in local Associate groups where this is possible for them.

At the conclusion of this stage, and in the light of the personal Rule of Life which has been developed and the recommendation of the Coordinator, the Abbot may choose to formally recognise the candidate as an Associate. In recent years, people have valued the option for this recognition to take place within the context of an Associate Retreat and in the presence of the monastic community gathered for worship.

### **Continuing formation**

Being recognised as an Associate is the beginning, not the end, of formation. The monastic vow of *conversatio morum* should be paralleled by a commitment of Associates to a lifelong process of formation.

This process includes at its core:

- o the modelling of the charism provided by both monastics and fellow Associates
- o an ever-deepening acquaintance with the Rule of Benedict
- o formation by the regular practice of *Lectio Divina*
- o appropriation of the discipline of the Hours of Prayer
- o cultivation of silence at the service of contemplative prayer
- o exploration of monastic spirituality and its adaptation to life beyond monastic enclosure

**Continuing formation is the responsibility both of the leaders of the Associate Community and of every individual Associate. There is mutual accountability for our journey into the fullness of the charism.**

The instruments of formation are therefore multiple. They include:

- o observance of an appropriate personal Rule of Life
- o regular attendance at a retreat at Kopua (and when possible this retreat should be one of the scheduled Associate Retreats). ***The maintenance of an authentic link with the Abbey is crucial.***
- o sharing in one of the study courses offered annually by the Associate community
- o regular participation in a local Associate group when geography makes this possible. Discussions here may complement the theme of the annual study, or be tailored to the specific need of the group
- o An up-to-date website [www.kopuacistercianassociates.nz](http://www.kopuacistercianassociates.nz).

The choice of theme for the annual studies is informed by a three yearly survey of all associates. It is possible and probably desirable to run several courses in any one year, for people with different needs and interests. Primary themes included so far have been 'Stability', 'Simplicity', 'Being contemplative in a suffering world', 'Benedict's Ladder of Humility', 'Lectio divina', 'Conversatio morum' and "Personal prayer."

Flexibility and simplicity must be features of the process of continuing formation. There is a diversity of circumstance which must be allowed to influence our approach: 'one size does not fit all'. In particular, special efforts must be made to enable the formation of geographically isolated Associates.

The responsibility of the monastic community in the formation of Associates is:

- o to model the charism
- o to give continuing advice about Formation (both its process and its content) to Associate leaders
- o to give input at Associate retreats.

Some Associates will be fortunate enough to receive spiritual direction (occasional or regular) from the monks. This is a privilege, not a right. The pastoral care of the Associate Community and the formation of its members are not the responsibility of the monastic community. The latter's role is to authenticate the Cistercian character of the Associate community, to be the focus of its 'stability', and to offer such advice, resource and admonition as it is able to without straining its resources for its primary vocation. That vocation is to live the monastic life under the Rule of Benedict.

### **Study themes**

- o **The Rule of Benedict**
- o **Cistercian tradition**
- o **Lectio divina**
- o **Hours of Prayer**
- o **Contemplative lifestyle and conversatio morum**
- o **Stability**
- o **Simplicity**
- o **Being contemplative in a suffering world**
- o **Benedict's Ladder of humility**
- o **Shaping a personal Rule of Life**
- o **Personal Prayer**