

## ***Bringing the Cistercian Charism to the World***

*“The only way for us to give witness is...to be what we are in the midst of banal, everyday realities.”*

-Blessed Christian de Chergé

Touched by the gifts of the Holy Spirit in response to a personal call and inspired by the beauty and fraternity of the monastic places with which we are associated, we are here at the Cistercian school of love. We seek ways to adapt and incorporate Cistercian habits of prayer, work, *lectio*, and contemplation into our daily lives.

The Cistercian charism is characterized first of all by the individual’s search for God that takes place in community, in the work and common prayer that sustain the community, and in the silence and solitude of contemplative prayer. It engenders mindfulness, humility, gratitude, and a deep love for all peoples, and, indeed, for the whole of creation. Lay Cistercians, with guidance from their monastic advisors, find ways to adapt and incorporate into their day-to-day lives Cistercian habits of prayer, work, *lectio*, and contemplation. The love that characterizes the Lay Cistercian communities and nourishes us also characterizes each member’s way of being in the world.

Our lay communities are places of permanent conversion and schools of charity where we learn to follow the rule of humility, obedience and discipline established by St. Benedict in a continuous journey of spiritual growth through *Lectio Divina*, personal and liturgical prayer, simplicity of life, and reception of the Eucharist. Our way of life is anchored in stability, asceticism, spiritual discipline, hospitality as service, and work as a means of sanctification. In this way we manifest Cistercian values in our daily lives through the commitments we have made:

- To balance prayer, work, and reflection with interior silence, solitude, and contemplation
- To maintain an open attitude to listening and dialogue
- To live in a spirit of love for those around us and serve as points of centeredness, compassion, and *caritas* in all our relationships
- To be witnesses of fidelity to commitment.

The contemplative life leads to a greater awareness of the world, and because being Cistercian in the world is our form of Christian vocation, our mission is to embody the Cistercian charism outside the monastery walls – to be the echo of the monastery bell that resounds in the world. We are messengers of contemplation, and witnesses of community and communion. We are committed to exercising stewardship of all resources, and manifesting respect and love for all creation.

As we immerse ourselves in our vocations with sincerity and fidelity, our desire to give witness and be of service springs naturally and spontaneously from grateful hearts that wish to share generously the gifts we receive freely. The social context in which we live influences how we seek to engage with the 'world'. We share the charism by our way of being as much as by our way of acting. On a practical level this can be done in many ways and so we seek to witness by:

- Fostering active ecumenical and interfaith engagement
- Making ourselves present in the needs of our closest brothers and sisters, individually and as a group
- Practicing mercy and compassion to all whom we encounter
- Living together as one family in God in the world

We seek to serve by:

- Actively expressing communality in all aspects of our life
- Fostering a relationship of service with the monastic community
- Offering hospitality and service to one another as associates in our local communities or individually
- Serving the church and the people of God

It is within our lay communities that our formation takes shape. They are places of permanent conversion and schools of charity where we are strengthened by the accompaniment and common prayer of our monastic formators. Sharing news, achievements, and difficulties, and praying for one another unites us in a common bond. In this way, our baptismal life can bloom and grow as our Lay Cistercian vocations are strengthened by our communion and nourished by our prayer.

The interior freedom that is the fruit of the lay Cistercian contemplative life allows honest and compassionate dialogue with the world in which we live. It is in that dialogue that our vocation is fulfilled; embracing all the reality of our lives in light of the Divine Reality that embraces all of creation.

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Assisi