



Central Commission  
**ROSCREA**  
June 9 - 17, 2016





## CENTRAL COMMISSION 2016 - PARTICIPANTS

1 **Abbot General** Dom EAMON Fitzgerald

### Commission of Coordination Members:

2 Promotor Dom JEAN-MARC Chéné, *Bellefontaine*  
3 Vice-Promoter Mother MARIE Fahy, *Glencairn*  
4 Members Dom ROBERTO De La Iglesia Perez, *Cardeña*  
5 Mother REBEKKA Willekes, *Klaarland*  
6 Dom BERNARDO Bonowitz, *Novo Mundo*

### Superior Delegates from the Regions:

7 CAN Dom CLEMENT Charbonneau, *Mistassini*  
8 CNE Dom OLIVIER Quénardel, *Cîteaux*  
9 ISLES Dom RICHARD Purcell, *Roscrea*  
10 NED Dom BERNARDUS Peeters, *Tilburg*  
11 ORIENS Mother GIOVANNA Garbelli, *Matutum*  
12 - Mother CECILIA Aoki, *Tenshien*  
13 RAFMA Dom JEAN-BOSCO Kamali, *Victoria*  
14 Mother HOTENSE Mituga Nsimire, *Clarté-Dieu (Absent)*  
15 RE Dom ISIDORO Anguita Fontecha, *Huerta*  
16 RéCiF Mother MARIE-CHRISTINE Vilmain, *Rivet*  
17 REI Mother MAGDALENA Köning, *Donnersberg* (substitute)  
18 REM Dom ERIC Antoine, *Aiguebelle* (substitute)  
19 Dom PLÁCIDO Alvarez Castro Quiros, *Los Andes (Absent)*  
20 REMILA Mother STELLA Venezia, *Juigalpa*  
21 US Dom ELIAS Dietz, *Gethsemani*

### Members of the Council of the Abbot General:

22 Dom TIMOTHY Kelly, Procurator  
23 Mother DANIELÈLE Levrard  
24 Mother REGINA Nebo  
25 Dom DAVID Lavich  
26 Dom SANTIAGO –MARIA Rios

(that is **24 persons** with the right of vote)

**Interpreters:**

27	French-English	Father WILLIAM Dingwall, <i>Spencer</i>
28	French-Spanish	Father JOSÉ LUIS Monge, <i>Viaceli</i>
29	English-French	Father GODEFROY Ragueneau de Saint Albin, <i>Syrie / Aiguebelle</i>
30	English-Spanish	Father SIMEON Leiva Marekakis, <i>Casa Generalizia/ Spencer</i>
31	Spanish-French	Father RAPHAËL Garcia-Pelayo, <i>Cîteaux</i>
32	Spanish-English	Brother GREGORY Escardo, <i>Gethsemani</i>

**Secretaries:**

34	English	Sister MARY- ELLEN Mc Cormack, <i>Wrentham</i>
35	French	Sister CLAIRE Boutin, <i>Casa Generalizia / Echourgnac</i>
36	Spanish	Sister MARIA ESTHER Briso-Montiano, <i>Carrizo / Wrentham</i>

**Guest for a few days:**

Sister MARIE Mouris, Central Secretary for Formation

## INTRODUCTION

The Abbot General opened the meeting with a warm welcome to all:

“I am happy to welcome each one of you to this Central Commission Meeting here at Mt St Joseph’s Abbey, Roscrea. All the members of the meeting are not present: Dom Placido of Los Andes, Venezuela, one of the two delegates of REMILA, and Mother Hortense of la *Clarté-Dieu*, one of the two delegates of RAFMA.

The purpose of this meeting is to prepare the General Chapter as the procedure says, “By coordinating the work of the Regions, establishing the program, deciding how the questions will be prepared and treated, and providing for the material organization of the Chapter.” This is our work during these days. May the Holy Spirit help us to work willingly with serenity and charity, with good humour and clarity so that we may be good servants of God and of the Order in the service of His kingdom, through Christ Our Lord.”

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## PRELIMINARY

### VOTING PROCEDURE DURING THE CENTRAL COMMISSION MEETING

The first task of the Central Commission meeting was to discuss a proposal regarding the formulation of votes.

*“In order to let the Coordinating Commission concentrate on its main role, which is to give direction to the General Chapter, it would be advantageous that the role of drafting votes be separated from the Coordinating Commission and given to a separate Commission” (CNE).*

It was therefore proposed that an *ad hoc* Commission be set up for this experiment consisting of three members. This procedure could be evaluated at the end of the Central Commission meeting. The possibility of the Central Commission delegating some of its tasks to an *ad hoc* Commission, for one reason or another, was foreseen in the procedures of the Central Commission #10. Therefore, it would be possible to implement this suggestion without any conflict. The Central Commission meeting was an opportunity to respond to this suggestion. Although it was not necessary to take a vote on this, it was thought that it would be best to do so as it is a different approach to formulating votes.

Other opinions were also expressed before the vote was taken, which pertained to the General Chapter.

- This formulation of votes by the *ad hoc* Commission would lighten the load of the Coordinating Commission at the General Chapter but would not exclude them from the formulation of votes.

- Coordinating Commission at the General Chapter formulate the votes and the *ad hoc* Commission perfect them.
- It would seem advisable to have one member of the Law Commission in the group nominated for this task. If not a nominated member at least there as an advisor.
- It was suggested that this approach to the formulation of votes at the General Chapter would affect the working of the Coordinating Commission. This change would affect not only the votes but the role of the Coordinating Commission.
- At the end of the Central Commission Meeting there would be an evaluation and a vote on the experiment of this procedure.

**VOTE 1**

WE WISH TO KEEP THE *STATUS QUO* AS GIVEN IN THE PROCEDURES OF THE CENTRAL COMMISSION.

(II 9B)

YES 7 NO 12 ABS 4 proposition rejected

**[The number of voters was 23 as one member had not yet arrived]**

**VOTE 2**

WE DESIRE THAT AT THIS CENTRAL COMMISSION THE COORDINATING COMMISSION CONTINUE TO DRAW UP THE VOTES. THE FORMULATION OF THE VOTES WILL BE REVISED BY AN *AD HOC* COMMISSION.

YES 21 NO 1 ABS 1 proposition accepted

**[This vote was not taken]**

WE DESIRE THAT AT THIS CENTRAL COMMISSION AN *AD HOC* COMMISSION BE RESPONSIBLE FOR THE FORMULATION OF VOTES.

**Nominations for the *ad hoc* Commission were given and three members were elected to revise the votes at the Central Commission Meeting.**

<b>Dom Elias of Gethsemani, 22</b>	<b>Elected</b>
<b>Mother Danielle – General Councillor, 17</b>	<b>Elected</b>
<b>Dom Isidoro of Huerta, 13</b>	<b>Elected</b>

## **Evaluation of the Experiment of the Central Commission.**

At the end of the Meeting of the Central Commission there was an evaluation of the experience of this *ad hoc* Commission to reflect on the positive and negative side of the possibility of using this method at the General Chapter.

### **By the Coordinating Commission of the procedure for voting.**

- Votes were clearer when they came to the meeting to be presented. One experience toward the end of the meeting, when the Coordination Commission did not have time to present them to the *ad hoc* Commission to review the votes, showed how time-consuming it was in the session due to inaccuracies.
- Made for efficiency in the presentation.
- Less pressure on the Coordinating Commission. During the General Chapter, there is often great pressure to get the votes formulated and time to do so is scarce. Having the support of *ad hoc* Commission lessened the pressure.

- It was peaceful and collaborative. Modifications of any votes were implemented constructively.

**By the three members of the *ad hoc* Commission**

- Important to have a common language to avoid doing the translations themselves.
- Much ease in working with the Coordinating Commission. Although there was no conflict at this meeting it would be good to keep in mind that at the General chapter there could be conflict.
- Keep clear boundaries between the Coordinating Commission and the *ad hoc* Commission.
- Coordinating Commission needs to have the final say on the votes.

**By the assembly**

- Corrections in the assembly were easily directed and rerouted.
- Felt the ease with which the Coordinating Commission and the *ad hoc* Commission worked together.
- If this procedure is accepted, it would be wise that the *ad hoc* Commission at the General Chapter includes some who were in the *ad hoc* Commission at the Central Commission Meeting.

**VOTE 3**

WE RECOMMEND THAT THE COORDINATING COMMISSION NAME A COMMISSION OF 3 PERSONS, REPRESENTING THE 3 OFFICIAL LANGUAGES OF THE GENERAL CHAPTER TO REVISE THE VOTES FORMULATED BY THE COORDINATING COMMISSION.

YES      23                      NO      0                      ABS      1                      **proposition accepted**

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# PREPARATION OF THE GENERAL CHAPTER

## 1 - CHOICE OF A THEME FOR THE GENERAL CHAPTER

REMILA proposed that we have a theme at the General Chapter. One which would not focus only on the analysis and solution of our pastoral problems, but rather on “the deepening of some central aspects of our charism in the context of a multicultural world.” REM also wanted a theme although it was not stated in their regional report. ORIENS liked the idea of a theme but would prefer it in the House Reports.

The Regions who prefer a theme offered the following observations:

- Fragility is a pre-occupation for some Regions – perhaps with a theme of the Vision of the Order would open us up and revitalize us in some way. The young need to center on the nucleus of our charism. Having a theme such as ‘The Vision of the Order’ they would be stimulated to search deeper into their vocation.
- A vote of NED requests the Abbot General and his Council play a more active role in helping the Order in its search for a common vision. It seems there is, in many Regions, a thirst for a common vision and that nothing is done; this causes frustration. But there is also the danger for some of a certain escalation of the expression "Common Vision". While it is important to have something that brings us together as communities and Order, there are the Constitutions. On other issues it is not necessarily bad to have different visions. There is a legitimate diversity that makes the greatness of the Order. It was the theme of the statute “Unity and Pluralism” in 1969.
- Something in the form of a theme which would help us recognize our fragility in the light of the gospel and the paschal mystery. One which would turn fragility into something positive. It would help us to take back to our communities something optimistic.
- Maybe the suggestion of RéCiF would be incorporated into a theme where they ask for that something to stimulate our “reflection on the ways we could translate the current teaching of the Church into the lives of our communities, for instance in the areas of ecology, of inter-religious dialogue and how we show ourselves to be reached by the “peripheries.”
- *The Cistercian Charism: A Path of Healing, Sanctification, and Communion or Cistercian Mysticism; The Discovery of Christ in a Multi-Cultural World and Monastic Life Today – Communion in Light of the Scriptures, were some themes mentioned for the General Chapter.*

On the other hand, there were Regions who would prefer not to have a theme and negative responses were generated:

- General Chapter is not a Congress or exposition of ideas. We come to work and to deal with the realities in our communities and in the Order.
- In the past, we have had themes and some did not go well.
- Nothing would be gained generating a theme for its own sake.



- If we deal well with the problems right in front of us and elaborate on where we are going. Keep focused on the big questions like ‘autonomy.’
- Not necessarily for the General Chapter but for the house reports.

Two votes of CAN ask that a ‘Commission for the Future of the Order’ be formed, made up of young superiors, giving the Order a new breath of life to be presented at the 2017 General Chapter. The Future of the Order and Vision of the Order seem to be the major concerns. But while waiting for a new breath to stimulate thinking is great, however, a certain reserve is felt before any project that might create a conflict of generation in the Order: the important thing is not that a superior is young or new, but that they have something to bring to the Chapter.

**VOTE 4**

WE WISH TO HAVE A THEME FOR THE GENERAL CHAPTER OF 2017.

YES 7 NO 12 ABS 3 proposition rejected

**VOTE 5**

WE ASK THAT THE ABBOT GENERAL AND HIS COUNCIL CHOOSE SOME SUPERIORS OF THE ORDER TO SPEAK AT THE GENERAL CHAPTER 2017 ON ‘THEIR VISION OF THE ORDER FOR THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY’.

YES 18 NO 1 ABS 5 **proposition accepted**

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## 2 - THE HOUSE REPORTS

### 2.1 - A theme or questions?

For the General Chapter of 2014, it was decided not to have a theme but rather have leading questions that had been written by two members of the Central Commission. For the 2017 General Chapter some Regions have requested a theme while other Regions prefer not to have a theme or guiding questions for the creation of their House Reports.

#### 2.1.1 - House Reports based on a questionnaire.

The words that came up frequently for the choice of a questionnaire were “concrete, life, reality” which would satisfy the desire for honesty and authenticity:

- There was a shared concern that a theme orients the House Report towards rhetoric about the monastic life which does not always correspond to what is the reality at present in our communities.
- With questions, the House Reports are more concrete and direct. They face reality and help us live the concrete, daily life in the community.
- They are not mandatory; communities are not required to follow the questionnaire when drawing up their report.
- The ideal would be something generic to avoid direct answers.

### 2.1.2 - House Reports based on a theme.

Those who were more in favor of a theme for the writing of the house report noted that:

- There is a strong need to stimulate reflection within communities and themes or guiding questions are not always enough to challenge them. If we have just questions the report may be limited to statistics, presentation of resources and difficulties, and hence the lack of content.
- It is not correct to say that when a theme is proposed, the report can become theoretical. The Regions that have the experienced discussions in the community around themes have insisted that it was an opportunity for them to talk about real life.

It was generally felt that the House Reports are MORE than just a summary of difficult situations or challenges. The question asked was what MORE would mean? An example was given an opportunity to help vulnerable communities see their fragility as a positive challenge and not only to reflect on difficult situations but see this fragility as a witness.

### 2.2 - What Theme? What questions?

As to the choice of a topic or to a questionnaire, some major thoughts and questions were shared and repeatedly words revolving around “common vision, mission, challenge, fragility, future” were heard.

- The desire shared by all was to seek a **common vision** for the future in our context of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, the **Cistercian charism** today and the challenge of its transmission in the world we live in and to face the difficulties of our communities.
- We must avoid ‘self-referential’ behaviours as our **mission** in the Church is not to be self-reflective about our problems; what happens in our communities. If we are continually self-reflective we will lose the vision of the Order, of the Church and of the World. What is the mission of the Church? If we lose this, we lose everything.
- **How do we respond** to what the Church asks us as monks and nuns? Our mission and prophetic witness.
- The reality of the challenge and what makes us live our particular life.
  
- What are our **weaknesses** and our **strengths** and what path should we take so that our weaknesses become our strengths?
- To move in a positive way to face to our **weaknesses**, two points of view are necessary: the *ad intra* community (how to energize the community from within. It must be done from the inside otherwise, it could become cosmetic. We must review the concrete actions of the superior in the community; the life of faith embodied in very real situations; internal relations; vocational opportunities) and *ad extra* community asking how we respond to what the church is asking in the areas of ecology, the role of immigrants and those on the fringes of society.

But it was also noted that it was difficult to gauge communities that would find a theme or issue suitable for all as there is so much diversity, let alone gauge the Order. To search globally could be disappointing. It was proposed finding people who have something to say, listening to them and seeing if anything emerges.

[Votes 6 and 7 are mutually exclusive]

**VOTE 6**

WE WISH TO HAVE A THEME FOR THE HOUSE REPORTS.

YES 6 NO 18 ABS 0 proposition rejected

**VOTE 7**

WE WISH TO HAVE GUIDING QUESTIONS FOR THE HOUSE REPORT.

YES 20 NO 1 ABS 3 **proposition accepted**

**VOTE 8**

WE WISH TO FORM A COMMISSION OF 2 PERSONS TO FORMULATE GUIDING QUESTIONS FOR THE HOUSE REPORTS.

YES 18 NO 6 ABST 0 **proposition accepted**

[The second option was a Commission of three persons]

**Nomination and Election of the authors of the questionnaire to guide the Communities in drafting their report.**

(2<sup>nd</sup> round)

**M. Lucia of Nasi Pani 17 Elected**

**Dom Erik of Mt St Bernard 16 Elected**

Dom Elias of Gethsemani 5

M. Kathy of Redwoods 4

Dom Bernardus of Tilburg 4

## 2.3 - Treatment of House Reports

### 2.3.1 – Recommendations: Moderators

Some Regions have made recommendations that:

- the plenary discussions, on the reports of the Commissions, don't get bogged down in endless questions and comments.
- respect for persons involved be preserved, some people in the previous chapter have been hurt publically.

### 2.3.2 - Redistribution of House Reports

This topic overlaps with the topic of the redistribution of Commissions, we will not repeat all the arguments that have been discussed (See 6.3 p.27). However, a new proposal by ORIENS was shared: that the Commissions read and discuss the House Reports of those who are members in their present Commission. Such a practice would:

- Mean not to have to seek the services of an interpreter and thus avoid language confusions and problems which arrive with comprehending difficulties.
- Save time by avoiding to have to change from one Commission to another.

But many others have pointed out that:

- This could limit the freedom of speech of members of the Commissions.
- Language problems are related to the international dimension of our Order and we accept this as it is our wealth also.

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## REGIONAL REPORTS

No region had questioned the existence of Regional Reports. However, some Regions have formulated votes to express recommendations or wishes regarding these reports.

### 3.1 - Purpose of the Regional Reports

The discussion on the need for a theme or a questionnaire for the development of Regional Reports has evolved into a discussion about the nature and purpose of these reports.

Originally, the Regional Reports have been thought to be a help to contextualize the House Reports to better understand them. Some Regions (RÉCÍF, USA) have made proposals in this regard, to ensure that these reports are helped to clearly identify the current situation of the Regions and the strengths and challenges they face.

- Some issues that had been highlighted about the House Reports (See 2.1.1. p.8) were taken, including the need to be open to the future, but always starting from the concrete, real-life communities.
- It was stressed that it was useful to have the statistics attached to the beginning of the House Reports this gives a quick, clear view of the situation and development of the various Regions.

However, other Regions (REM ORIENS) made proposals to broaden the scope of these Reports which would provide an opportunity for Regions to express their view on the Future of the Order.

It would allow:

- That each Region can express their expectations for the future. (Many communities have been disappointed to see that the questions posed at the end of the House Report in preparation for the 2014 Chapter were ignored by the House Reports and therefore were not reflected in the Regional Reports. Therefore, the Reports could take up again the theme: What do Regions expect from the Order?)
- To move in a more general discernment to see where the Order is going.

**[The votes 9 and 10 are mutually exclusive]**

#### VOTE 9

WE WISH TO HAVE A THEME FOR THE REGIONAL REPORT

YES 2 NO 21 ABS 0 proposition rejected

#### VOTE 10

WE WISH TO HAVE GUIDING QUESTIONS FOR THE REGIONAL REPORTS.

YES 16 NO 5 ABS 3 proposition accepted

#### VOTE 11

WE WISH TO FORM A COMMISSION OF 2 PERSONS TO FORMULATE GUIDING QUESTIONS FOR THE REGIONAL REPORTS.

YES 18 NO 6 ABS 0 proposition accepted

**[The other option was a Commission of 3 persons]**

*(This Commission is the same Commission who will formulate guide questions to help the communities with their House Reports. Those elected to do this were Mother Lucia of Nasi Pani and Dom Erik of Mt St Bernard. (See 2.2 p.10)*

## 3.2 - Treatment of Regional Reports

### 3.2.1 - When?

Some Regions suggested that the Reports be read at the beginning of the General Chapter so that a clear picture of a global vision of the Order could be seen.

#### VOTE 12

WE WISH TO READ THE REGIONAL REPORTS AT THE BEGINNING OF THE GENERAL CHAPTER.

YES 22 NO 1 ABS 0 **proposition accepted**

### 3.2.2 - How?

#### Read in private and discussed in the Aula.

The Regions of NED and ISLES suggested that the reports be read in private and discussed in the aula during a session. It would allow for:

- Saving time/ but in the endeavor to save time one would ask if this is a good criterion of discernment?
- Alleviate this part of the Chapter which is a little heavy/but will all members of the Chapter take the time to read all the Reports of the Regions if they are not read publically?
- It would be a shame not to hear them all together.

#### Read and discussed in the Assembly then discussed in Commissions.

REM has proposed that time be given to the Commissions to allow discussion on these reports. Some disappointment was expressed in 2014 at the richness of some reports and the inability to discuss what has been shared. It would be interesting to try to discern, after reading all the reports, which direction the Order is moving in and also for direction in the study of the House Reports.

#### VOTE 13

WE DESIRE THAT THE COMMISSIONS HAVE TIME TO DISCUSS THE REGIONAL REPORTS

YES 15 NO 5 ABS 3 **proposition accepted**

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## 4 - POINTS TO BE PUT ON THE AGENDA OF THE GENERAL CHAPTER

### 4A – COMMUNITIES WITH GROWING FRAGILITY

In response to the two votes taken at the 2014 General Chapter which were related to the possibility of a Commission gathering information on declining communities and Constitution 67, that emerged during the General Chapter 2014, a working paper “Declining Communities and Constitution 67” was prepared by the elected Commission (Dom Elias of Gethsemani, Dom Richard of Roscrea, and Mother Pillar of Tulebras) and presented to the Regions for study. The Regions were asked to study this working document in preparation for the Central Commission meeting in 2016.

These were the votes taken at the 2014 General Chapter:

**VOTE 59**

*WE DESIRE TO CREATE A COMMISSION TO GATHER ALL THE MATERIAL ON DECLINING COMMUNITIES AND CST 67 THAT EMERGED DURING THIS GENERAL CHAPTER AS WELL AS CORRESPONDING MATERIAL FROM OTHER MONASTIC ORDERS.*

YES 152                      NO 10                      ABS 5                      **proposition accepted**

**VOTE 60**

*WE WISH THAT THIS COMMISSION, BASED ON THE MATERIAL THEY HAVE GATHERED, OFFER SUGGESTIONS AND PROPOSALS TO THE REGIONS.*

YES 152                      NO 11                      ABS 5                      **proposition accepted**

**VOTE 61**

*WE WISH THAT THE REGIONS PRONOUNCE ON WHETHER THEY WISH TO HAVE A STATUTE OR PASTORAL GUIDELINES*

YES 148                      NO 16                      ABS 3                      **proposition accepted**

As a result of this study the following points were raised:

#### **A Broad and Positive Reflection**

There is a growing desire to reflect on the question of the fragility of communities and autonomy that it be seen, not in a negative light but rather in a positive way.

- Have a broad discussion on autonomy and not narrow it to fragile communities only.
- Discuss it in the larger context of the Charter of Charity and how we live our lives in the light of the weaknesses of our communities.
- Concentrate more on the pastoral aspect rather than the legislative side of the question when working with a community.
- Pay more attention to the quality of life lived not on autonomy.
- Be aware that even though some monasteries do not have the conditions to remain autonomous the actual situation may call for their presence in certain regions of the world. Example: as a Christian presence. A witness to Christ and his Church such as Morocco and Syria and Yugoslavia.

#### **Fragility seen as a Natural Process of the Life of a Community – Birth and Death**

Focus on the concept of life and death as a natural process at the 2017 Chapter. Everything is a gift. Taking into consideration the whole natural process of the life of the community going from birth to death.

An interesting remark on this topic was shared. In an address, during the International Congress for the Consecrated Life 2016, Father Paciolla reminded all that “.....*autonomy is a gift to the church to monastic communities and having received this gift we must live it out.*”

There was a strong desire for a document to support decisions which have to be made when a community is fragile. Autonomy can become perverse when we are convinced we have the gift of the Spirit rather than reflecting on it as a point of conversion.

## **4A 1 – A Study of the Question of Autonomy**

A request for the study of the autonomy of the houses was a topic desired by all the Regions for the program of the 2017 General Chapter. This topic is very broad and is linked with government, formation finances, statistics, fathers immediate, affiliations, suppression of an autonomous monastery, and all the ramifications of this decision.

There were many requests that the concept of autonomy would be clarified at the very beginning of the General Chapter. What do we understand by autonomy? A vote of NED suggested that a working paper be produced to further clarify the concept of autonomy – its goals, limits, and possibilities.

It was also noted that in 2014 the Congregation issued a questionnaire to the cloistered nuns. One paragraph in that questionnaire was concerning autonomy. It stated the criteria by which one can judge if a house has lost its autonomy both in reality and legislatively. There are four criteria by which to judge this:

- Membership
- Leadership
- Formation
- Economy

These are similar to the requirements we have in the Statute on Foundations. For the Congregation, for us to retain autonomy we must sustain these four areas.

In vote 61 of the 2014 General Chapter, the Regions were asked as to whether they wish to have a statute or pastoral guidelines on declining communities if so what type of document they wished: Legislative? Pastoral? Or both?

The following suggestions reflect the requests of the various Regions:

### **4A 1.1 – A Statute?**

There was some resistance to a Statute as it would be a legislative document and not pastoral. However, there were some requests concerning a Statute :

- Revision on the Statute on Foundations which would include the different stages of life.
- New Statute be drafted fostering the implementation of pastoral guidelines.

### **4A 1.2 – Pastoral Guidelines?**

Most of the Regions requested some form of pastoral guidelines. These requests are not related to Cst 67, but rather for definite documentation to help resolve the many difficult aspects of fragile communities and autonomy.

- Pastoral Guidelines for the care of communities with growing fragility.

- Pastoral Guidelines described in the working paper prepared by the Commission elected by the General Chapter 2014: *Communities with growing fragility and Constitution 67.*
- Pastoral Document which should include the following suggestions by CNE:
  - *An introduction, giving the over-all vision which forms the basis for interpreting all the concrete points that follow;*
  - *The role of the superior of the house involved;*
  - *The role of the Father Immediate: how to accompany the community while respecting its particular situation; how to search, together with the community, for new dynamic solutions in response to its fragility;*
  - *The role of the Commission of aid;*
  - *The role of the Commissions of the General Chapter;*
  - *The role of the Regional Conferences;*
  - *Etc....*

#### **4A 1.3 - Something Else?**

Vade Mecum/Combination of Statute and Guidelines/Declaration/Reference Points/Document without a name. (General Chapter will give it a name.)

As most Regions wanted pastoral guidelines with norms it could simply be called a document which would direct and support and accompany communities with increasing fragility.

It was also pointed out that it is easy to embellish the fact in nice thoughts when what is really needed are practical guidelines which help the Father Immediate and the Commission for the Future working on individual situations in these difficult cases. It is obvious that there are some situations when it is not humanly or monastically viable to continue sustaining a monastery nor would it be possible to get a 2/3 majority vote from such a fragile community.

Base any document which may need to be made on a combination of pastoral and concrete ideals.

#### **4A.2 - Revision or/and modification of Cst 67**

The desire to revise Cst 67 was expressed by RéCiF, NED, REMILA, RE, USA, REI while ORIENS would prefer a Statute to be added to Cst 67 while keeping in mind the right to autonomy.

It was stated that Cst 67 is a little negative and the mode of the language is too imperative so something needs to be done to make it more encouraging.

Suggestions for inclusion in the revision:

- Cst 67 be revised which would reflect partial and/or temporary withdrawal of autonomy with the goal of reviving or suppressing a monastery.
- Statute to be added along the lines of “It is the responsibility of the Father Immediate to initiate the process of the suppression of a monastery.”
- Possible reduction in rank and who has the powers of making a decision. Even if lowering the status is ultimately not a solution.
- Revise the 2/3 vote of the Conventual Chapter, as it is almost impossible to obtain in a fragile community as experience has shown. (Although at this point, the presentation of the process initiated after the Chapter of 2014 by the Irish communities of monks has been very enlightening and enabled us to realize that it should not make generalizations about it).



- Require an absolute majority of the Conventual Chapter.
- Require absolute majority in cases when the community is made up of 10 or fewer members.
- Delete the first sentence of Cst 67: *“When due to particular and long-standing circumstances a monastery no longer offers any basis for hope of growth, careful consideration should be given to whether it is to be closed.”*
- Cst 67 be transferred to another, a more appropriate section, possibly at the end of “Foundations” in our present Constitution. Include in revision the question of autonomy of a community that finds itself in the last stage of its life.
- Include in the revisions of the Constitution 67 the issue of autonomy of a community that is in the last stage of life.

**VOTE 14**

WE WISH TO PUT ON THE AGENDA OF THE GENERAL CHAPTER 2017 A REVISION OF CST 67.

YES 24 **unanimously accepted**

**VOTE 15**

WE ASK THE LAW COMMISSION TO PREPARE A WORKING PAPER ON THIS TOPIC.

YES 22 NO 0 ABS 2 **proposition accepted**

**VOTE 16**

WE WISH THAT THIS TOPIC BE TREATED BY EXTRAORDINARY PROCEDURE.

YES 23 NO 0 ABS 1 **proposition accepted**

**[The other option was ordinary procedure]**

**VOTE 17**

WE WISH THAT CST 67 AND THE QUESTION OF AUTONOMY OF THE COMMUNITIES BE STUDIED WITHIN THE FRAMEWORK OF A BROAD AND POSITIVE REFLECTION, TAKING INTO ACCOUNT THE WHOLE NATURAL PROCESS OF THE LIFE OF COMMUNITIES, GOING FROM BIRTH TO DEATH.

YES 23 NO 0 ABS 1 **proposition accepted**

**VOTE 18**

WE WISH THAT A WORKING PAPER FOR THE ACCOMPANIMENT OF COMMUNITIES WITH INCREASING FRAGILITY BE DRAWN UP FOR THE GC 2017.

YES 23 NO 1 ABS 0 **proposition accepted**

**VOTE 19**

WE WISH TO INCLUDE IN THIS DOCUMENT:

- CRITERIA FOR EVALUATING THE STATUS OF THE COMMUNITY IN REGARD TO MEMBERSHIP, LEADERSHIP, FORMATION AND ECONOMY
- THE ROLE OF THE FATHER IMMEDIATE: HOW TO ACCOMPANY THE COMMUNITY WHILE RESPECTING ITS PARTICULAR SITUATION; HOW TO SEARCH, TOGETHER WITH THE COMMUNITY, FOR NEW DYNAMIC SOLUTIONS IN RESPONSE TO ITS FRAGILITY;
- THE ROLE OF THE COMMISSION OF AID;
- THE ROLE OF THE COMMISSIONS OF THE GENERAL CHAPTER;
- THE ROLE OF THE REGIONAL CONFERENCES;

YES 23 NO 0 ABS 1 **proposition accepted**

**VOTE 20**

WE WISH TO ENTRUST THE WRITING OF THIS DOCUMENT TO A COMMISSION.

YES 23 NO 0 ABS 1 **proposition accepted**

[Votes 21 and 22 are mutually exclusive]

**VOTE 21**

WE WISH THAT THIS COMMISSION BE COMPOSED OF 2 MEMBERS.

YES 9 NO 13 ABS 2 **proposition rejected**

**VOTE 22**

WE WISH THAT THIS COMMISSION BE COMPOSED OF 3 MEMBERS.

YES 19 NO 1 ABS 4 **proposition accepted**

**Election of Members for a working paper:**

(2<sup>nd</sup> Vote)

<b>Dom Bernardus of Tilburg –</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>Elected</b>
<b>M. Rebekka of Klaaland –</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>Elected</b>
<b>Dom Clement of Mistassini –</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>Elected</b>
M. Dominique of Soleilmont –	11	

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## **4B - FATHER IMMEDIATE AND STATUTE ON REGULAR VISITATION**

It was expressed that this topic became quite complex due to the difficulty of finding Fathers Immediate, which is a pressing need in some Regions. This question is very closely connected with the autonomy of houses and the judicial nature of filiations. Also, the question of non-priest superiors is another aspect of the Father Immediate question. When a community has a non-priest superior the role of the Father Immediate is more important as a non-priest usually cannot act as a Father Immediate. There have been situations which have arisen and will increase in the future.

The topic of Fathers Immediate has been approached a number of times in the past.

### **4B. 1 – Recent History of the Question**

- **2007 Central Commission at Cardeña** – the Law Commission was asked to draw up a working paper on the Structures of the Order, which includes Fathers Immediate, for the General Mixed Meeting 2008.
- **2008 General Chapters** – the General Chapters had begun thinking about this question.
- **2011 General Chapters** – all mixed Commissions reflected on the role of the Father Immediate and the challenges he faces in carrying out his ministry. Their reflections showed that certain questions required more clarification therefore at the next General Chapter. A vote was taken to ask that the proposals made by the Commissions be studied at the following General Chapter of 2014.

- **2013 – Regions** reflected on this request and at the Central Commission at Cîteaux 2013. Seven Regions (RéCiF, RE, RAFMA, NED, REM, USA, CAN) felt that the present legislation on Regular Visitation and the Father Immediate was sufficient while some Regions proposed changes to the legislation on the Regular Visitation.
- **2014 General Chapter** – a study by Ordinary Procedure of the Regular Visitation of the Father Immediate was put on the program but there was no time to study the question.

## **4B. 2 – The Situation of the Question of Father Immediate**

There was a pressing need to explore this topic by some Regions and they requested that the question of the Fathers Immediate be studied at the 2017 General Chapter and that the difficulties of finding Fathers Immediate be presented also (USA, ISLES).

- It is not only a problem of one Region: Oriens, with distance and difficulty of language; Europe with fragile communities; and Africa with many complex situations. All Regions, in fact, are impacted by this problem.
- In view of the difficulty in finding Fathers Immediate and the increased numbers of delegated Fathers Immediate, this topic has become quite urgent.
- There is not a uniform model for the role of Father Immediate. The experiences differ depending on the region of the Order.

## **4B. 3 - A Particular Case: The Houses in Africa**

The special case of several houses in Africa, especially in Nigeria, required a greater attention from the members of the Central Commission. There were requests from the Region of ISLES, RE, that the problems, special needs, and many unresolved situations of these communities be concretely addressed at the 2017 General Chapter; among these problems is principally the question of Fathers Immediate, highlighted by RAFMA. Some at this stage in their history do not have a Father Immediate. As was clearly stated, the question of the Father Immediate is extremely complex in developing countries even though the problem of the absence of the Father Immediate is not the only difficulty.

### **- Problem of the absence of a Father Immediate.**

- It was noted that in the last two years many abbots have been approached asking if they would fulfill this role in some of the African houses but for various reasons are unable to accept. In the search for Fathers Immediate, it is not only the search for a person but also a community. The Father Immediate is the strength of the bond and brotherhood between two communities of the Order. An abbot may agree to become Father Immediate but the community may not be in favor of it.

### **- Economic issues, management and financial support.**

- The houses have no resources and are extremely dependent on the Father Immediate to survive, which complicates his role as pastor: how is it possible to separate the pastoral role of the Father Immediate from the immediate material needs and finances of the house? How do we find other ways to answer the immediate material needs?

-

**- Problem of Formation and transmission of the monastic tradition to new communities or growing communities.**

- The Superiors of Africa are young and do not have much experience. They need to be encouraged, supported, challenged. They need someone to talk to and receive advice.

**Some suggestions for the future:**

In its efforts to find solutions to these problems the Central Commission has proposed some ideas to consider:

- Form a small group at the beginning of the Chapter to identify the real problems and seek solutions which may be temporary but do respond to the current emergency situation.
- Possibility of having a meeting with the African superiors and their Fathers Immediate in the presence of the Abbot General and the councilors who are involved with the African situation to find concrete solutions. (A possible meeting before or during the General Chapter of 2017).
- Motivate community elders of experience to go to help in Africa in the field of training and supporting the monks and also to be a support for the superior.

**A strong intervention was made on this topic:**

In 2019 we will be celebrating the 9<sup>th</sup> centenary of the Charter of Charity. It was stated that the Order has more of an obligation than is realized to help one another in these situations. It is not enough to simply refuse to do a visitation. We are autonomous communities, but we are also an Order and there has to be some possibility at the General Chapter to ask straight out for somebody to assume the paternity and the responsibility of a certain house, at least temporarily. If there is not a change of attitude in terms of the level of mutual obligation, these questions will remain without a solution. No situation simply remains the same. Left without a solution the situation deteriorates rapidly. There has to be some way to insist that abbots and communities, with a reasonable workload, take on more responsibility. Otherwise, things are permanently stuck.

## **4B. 4 Votes and Election**

**VOTE 23**

WE WISH THAT THE QUESTION OF THE FATHERS IMMEDIATE BE STUDIED AT THE 2017 GENERAL CHAPTER, IN VIEW OF THE NUMBER OF DELEGATED FATHERS IMMEDIATE AND THE DIFFICULTY OF FINDING FATHERS IMMEDIATE.

YES 24

**unanimously accepted**

**VOTE 24**

WE WISH THAT THE QUESTION OF FATHERS IMMEDIATE BE TREATED BY EXTRAORDINARY PROCEDURE.

YES 23 NO 0 ABS 1

**proposition accepted**

[The other vote was by ordinary procedure]

**VOTE 25**

WE WISH THAT A WORKING PAPER BE DRAWN UP EXAMINING THE CURRENT SITUATION AND PROPOSING CREATIVE SUGGESTIONS FOR THE FUTURE.

YES 24

**unanimously accepted**

**VOTE 26**

WE WISH TO ENTRUST THE WRITING OF THIS PAPER TO A COMMISSION.

YES 24

**unanimously accepted**

[These votes are mutually exclusive]

**VOTE 27**

WE WISH THAT THIS COMMISSION BE COMPOSED OF 2 PERSONS

YES 6 NO 17 ABS 1 proposition rejected

**VOTE 28**

WE WISH THAT THIS COMMISSION BE COMPOSED OF 3 PERSONS

YES 22 NO 1 ABS 1 proposition accepted

**Election of three members to write a working paper on the Father Immediate.**

**Dom Timothy – Procurator General and Councilor to the Abbot General 16 Elected**

**Mother Martha of Gedono 13 Elected**

**Dom Olivier of Cîteaux 11 Elected**

Dom John Bosco of Victoria 8

Mother Anne-Emmanuelle of Blauvac 7

**4B.5 - Delegation of Regular Visitation**

Two Regions (REMILA, CNE) expressed opinions concerning the delegation of the Regular Visitation: It is good to have a new point of view on a community from time to time but the period between delegations could be prolonged, not necessarily every 6 years.

- When the Father Immediate has a different language, 6 years is a good interval.
- It was also stated that it can be difficult when it is a different language. However, it did help when the visitor was accompanied by someone of the community's own language.
- Another suggestion was that there is the same legislation about delegation of Regular Visitation for monks and nuns. It seems that most monks prefer to keep the legislation as it is.
- A question was raised about Fathers Immediate and their refusal to delegate. It was stated that as the Constitution provides that the Abbot General does delegate a visitation in certain situations. A suggestion was that the delegation goes to the president of the Region. There is no one way to approach the situation in all the Regions and the Constitutions allows for the basic situations which arise.

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## 4C – RESIGNATION OF ABBOTS AND ABBESSES

### 4C 1 – Presentation of Resignations

There were different points of view expressed as to when resignations should be presented. REM, referring to our Constitutions, Cst 40, which states that resignations should be at the General Chapter while USA and NED thought it more advantageous, due to the increasing number of resignations, that resignations be handled by the Abbot General and his Council. Exceptional circumstances only would be referred to the General Chapter. This would lessen the time spent on the resignation of superiors at the Chapter. There was a proposal that a Statute would be added on this topic which would become ST 40.D.

### 4C 2 – Study of the Procedure for Resignations

The topic of studying the Resignation of Abbots and Abbesses who reach the canonical age was discussed in many of the Regions of the Order. This study would also include the situation of superiors *ad nutum*. The points below reflect the discussion :

- A wish that the resignation of an abbot/abbess could be taken at the beginning of the chapter, however, others suggested waiting until the House Reports have been studied before requesting a resignation.
- There was discomfort as to how the resignations were presented at the 2014 Chapter, therefore, RéCiF proposed a standardized procedure which would have the advantage of being the same for all cases and for all the Commissions. Some are not totally satisfied with the procedure proposed by RéCiF which is below:

*We accept the resignation.*

*Yes – No – Abstention*

*If the vote is accepted, vote (b) is then taken.*

*If the vote is not accepted, vote © is taken.*

- (a) *The resignation will take effect on such and such a date.*

*Yes – No – Abstention*

- (b) *The abbot ... shall present his resignation at such and such a time (next General Chapter, or on this given date...)*

*Yes – No – Abstention*

Many agreed that a standardized procedure would be a good way of proceeding. It would be a great advantage for synthesis and clarity when presenting the votes of the Commissions.

#### VOTE 29

WE WISH THAT THE GENERAL CHAPTER USE A STANDARDIZED PROCEDURE IN DEALING WITH RESIGNATIONS OF ABBOTS AND ABBESSES.

YES 24

**unanimously accepted**

### 4C 3 - Revision of Votes 47 – 50 – General Chapter 2014

The Regions of USA and CAN requested that the Vote 47 – 50 of the General Chapter 2014 be revised and recommend that if a person older than 75 is postulated he/she is automatically elected for a 3-year mandate.

These are the Votes to which the USA and CAN Regions are referring to which were taken at the General Chapter 2014:

**1. Election of the Abbot/Abbess**

VOTE 47

*A monk or nun having attained 75 years of age can neither be elected nor postulated.* WE APPROVE STATUTE 39.3.A

YES 69 NO 76 ABS 9 *proposition rejected*

VOTE 48

*The candidate must be at least thirty-five years of age and less than 75 years of age.* :

WE APPROVE THE COMPLETED STATUTE 39.3.A

YES 128 NO 28 ABS 8 *proposition accepted*

**2. Resignation of the Abbot/Abbess**

VOTE 49

*The abbot/abbess having been postulated at an age beyond 75 and whose postulation has been confirmed shall spontaneously offer his/her resignation at the next General Chapter:*

WE APPROVE STATUTE 40.A bis.

YES 146 NO 9 ABS 10 *proposition accepted*

VOTE 50

*The abbot/abbess whose resignation at age 75 had not been accepted will present it again at the next General Chapter:*

WE APPROVE THE NEW STATUTE 40.A

YES 155 NO 4 ABS 6 *proposition accepted*

- For many years in the Order, there have been personal requests to raise the age and these votes were a way to respond to this request.
- After the Chapter, there was a case which corresponded to the content of these votes taken at the 2014 chapter. The Father Immediate at first was not in favor of this vote but experience showed him it went well and he was able to see its value.

On the other hand, it was pointed out that:

- There was a great deal of confusion when the vote was taken and it is not sure that everyone understood the importance of these votes. Hence, it seems in many Regions there is a desire to revisit the topic and have further discussion on it.
- Already in our Constitutions, there are the possibilities to deal with these situations concerning resignations and postulations.
- These statutes do not find the true solutions but just postpone the deadlines and three years after the same problems are still here. It is urgent to find new solutions.
- This topic is closely linked with the question of the Father Immediate. All the topics are closely linked: Fathers Immediate, fragility and viability of the community, resignation, appointment of superiors *ad nutum*, and postulation of those who are over 75. If the Central Commission wants to place on the agenda of the General Chapter 2017 the revision of votes 47-50, it would be necessary to ask for a working paper which helps to reflect and clarify the union between all these aspects of the topic.

**VOTE 30**

WE WISH TO PLACE ON THE AGENDA OF THE GENERAL CHAPTER 2017 THE REVISION OF VOTES 47-50 TAKEN DURING THE GENERAL CHAPTER 2014.

YES 15 NO 2 ABS 6 *proposition accepted*

[The votes 31 and 32 are mutually exclusive]

**VOTE 31**

WE WISH TO TREAT THE REVISION OF VOTES 47-50 BY EXTRAORDINARY PROCEDURE.

YES 12 NO 12 ABS 0 proposition rejected

**VOTE 32**

WE WISH TO TREAT THE REVISION OF VOTES 47-50 BY ORDINARY PROCEDURE.

YES 20 NO 1 ABS 3 proposition accepted

[With reference to the vote 32 see also Chapter 7.2 – Ordinary Procedures p.29 – Vote 44]

**VOTE 33**

WE WISH TO HAVE A WORKING PAPER ON THIS TOPIC.

YES 24 unanimously accepted

**VOTE 34**

WE ENTRUST THIS WORKING PAPER TO THE LAW COMMISSION.

YES 21 NO 0 ABS 3 proposition accepted

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## 5 - VARIOUS POINTS

### 5A - POINTS NOT TREATED IN THE LAST GENERAL CHAPTER

*Due of lack of time at the end of the 2014 Chapter, the Coordinating Commission had to resign itself to not treating certain subjects that were on the program. Several Regional Conferences have mentioned these subjects asking that they be revisited or dropped.*

#### 5A. 1 - Financial Needs of the Houses of the Order

If NED is the only region to have asked to continue the discussion about the financial needs of the houses of the Order, which had not been treated in the last chapter for lack of time, several Regions have expressed frustration that this topic was not discussed and emphasized its importance because of the situation of fragility and precariousness of many houses of the Order.

Dom Armand of Scourmont, Mother Myriam of Laval and Dom Isidoro of Huerta, who were consulted, believe that the document, written for the 2014 Chapter, could be presented at the next Chapter in 2017, but with an addition that would be needed concerning the finances of the



monasteries which are closing and the management of their land and buildings. (See Preparation Booklet Chapter, p 65, Document No. 7. - The Financial Needs of the Houses of the Order)

It has been suggested:

- Invite the same Commission to review the document by supplementing this point while taking into account the circular letter sent in 2014 by the Congregation for Religious on guidelines for management in Institutes of Consecrated Life. The contents of this document give a new light on the situation.
- Encourage members of the Order to study management courses, that are given at Sant'Anselmo in Rome which could help in the cases of Houses which are closing.

**VOTE 35**

WE WISH THAT THE QUESTION OF THE FINANCIAL NEEDS OF THE HOUSES OF THE ORDER, THAT WAS NOT DEALT WITH AT THE GENERAL CHAPTER 2014, BE PLACED ON THE AGENDA OF THE GENERAL CHAPTER 2017.

YES 22 NO 0 ABS 1 **proposal accepted**

**VOTE 36**

WE WISH THAT THE QUESTION OF THE FINANCIAL NEEDS OF THE HOUSES OF THE ORDER BE TREATED BY EXTRAORDINARY PROCEDURE DURING THE GENERAL CHAPTER.

YES 17 NO 4 ABS 3 **proposal accepted**

[The other vote was by the normal procedure]

**VOTE 37**

WE WISH THAT THE WORKING PAPER ON THE FINANCIAL NEEDS OF THE HOUSES OF THE ORDER FOUND IN THE GENERAL BOOKLET OF THE GENERAL CHAPTER 2014 BE REVISED BY THE AUTHORS FOR INCLUSION IN THE GENERAL BOOKLET OF 2017 GENERAL CHAPTER.

YES 24 **unanimously accepted**

(Dom Armand of Scourmont, Mother Myriam of Laval and Dom Isidoro of Huerta, authors of the working paper on the financial needs of the Order, which had been included in the General Booklet of the General Chapter 2014, will revise the document for study at the General chapter of 2017).

## 5A. 2 - Link Between the Founding Houses of Nuns and their Daughter Houses

The link between the founding houses of nuns and their daughter houses has been an outstanding issue for some length of time. Due to time constraints, it was not treated in 2014. REMILA and Récif took votes on this topic and ask that it not be put on the program for the 2017 General Chapter, on the other hand (REMILA) asked that a *Vade Mecum* be drafted.

To bring a definite and official closure to this topic a vote was taken.

**VOTE 38**

WE DESIRE THAT THE SUBJECT OF THE BOND BETWEEN THE FOUNDING HOUSES OF NUNS AND THEIR DAUGHTER HOUSES BE PUT ON THE PROGRAM OF THE 2017 GENERAL CHAPTER.

YES 0 NO 24 ABS 0 **unanimously rejected**

## 5A. 3 - Statute of Pories

During the revision of the Statute on Foundations the RGM 2011 had requested by a vote that the Law Commission study the issue of having only one type of priory, thus eliminating the distinction between simple and major priory. (*See Vote 26 Minutes of the MGM 2011 p. 164*)

The Law Commission then prepared a working paper on "The Status of Pories in our Order" that had been inserted in the General Booklet Chapter 2014 (Working Paper No. 8, p.33-37). The subject, which was on the program for the 2014 Chapter was not treated due to lack of time.

REMILA requested that it not be put on the program for the 2017 General Chapter. Other Regions did not remark on this topic.

### VOTE 39

WE WISH THAT THE QUESTION OF THE "STATUS OF PRIORIES IN OUR ORDER", THAT WAS NOT DEALT WITH AT THE GENERAL CHAPTER 2014, BE PLACED ON THE AGENDA OF THE GENERAL CHAPTER 2017.

YES 2 NO 19 ABS 3 proposition rejected

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## 5B – QUESTION OF NON-PRIESTS SUPERIORS

The RAFMA asked by a vote that the General Chapter present to the Holy See the question of non-priest superiors.

In 2008, MGM had entrusted to the Abbot General the task of again presenting to the Congregation the decisions taken at the 2005 MGM about a non-priest superior, the enclosure, and a single general chapter.

### Vote 51

*WE WOULD LIKE IT TO BE POSSIBLE, IN EXCEPTIONAL CASES, FOR AN ABBOT TO BE CONFIRMED WITHOUT HAVING TO BE ORDAINED PRIEST, WITH DISPENSATION OF THE HOLY SEE.*

YES 72 NO 27 ABS 0 *proposition accepted*

### Vote 53

*WE WOULD LIKE AN ABBOT ELECTED FOR A FIXED TERM NOT TO BE OBLIGED TO BE ORDAINED PRIEST, WITH THE DISPENSATION OF THE HOLY SEE*

YES 64 NO 31 ABS 1 *proposition accepted*

### VOTE 65

*WE ENTRUST TO THE ABBOT GENERAL WITH THE RESPONSIBILITY OF PRESENTING TO THE HOLY SEE AGAIN, WHEN AND IN THE FORM HE SEES IT TO BE OPPORTUNE, THE DECISIONS OF THE GENERAL CHAPTERS OF 2005 CONCERNING A NON-PRIEST SUPERIOR, THE ENCLOSURE, AND A SINGLE GENERAL CHAPTER.*

**GCf** YES 57 NO 12 ABS 2 *proposition accepted*

**GCm** YES 55 NO 30 ABS 4 *proposition accepted*

Of the three decisions presented, only the decision about the unique chapter resulted. Regarding enclosure, the Holy See is preparing a document on the subject and asked the Order to wait before resubmitting an application. In terms of the issue of non-priest superiors, two years ago advice was given against presenting this request because the moment was deemed inappropriate.

So the vote in 2008 remains valid and therefore it returns to the Abbot General to judge when and in the form it will be opportune to re-present to the Holy See the decision of Chapter 2005. The question was not put on the program for the General Chapter 2017.

# FUNCTIONING OF THE GENERAL CHAPTER

## 6 - COMMISSIONS

### 6.1 - The Coordination Commission

The quality of the work done by the members of the Coordination Commission was already recognized in the assessment of the General Chapter of 2014 and was again highlighted at the Central Commission meeting.

However, some Regions wanted to make a few requests or recommendations:

#### 6.1.1. Role and Functions

- The role of the Coordinating Commission should be reviewed as to its role and functions (CNE) due to the heaviness of the role entrusted to them. The creation of an *ad hoc* Commission for the revision of votes would facilitate this. (*Refer to the opening session of the Central Commission 2016*)
- The Coordinating Commission should evaluate its functioning (NED) in order to reflect particularly on the role of the moderator of the plenary assembly, who is also a member of the Chapter. (See Preliminary p.4-6)
- Its members should be renewed regularly so that there is always new life flowing at our Chapters, although there is value in having continuity in a function. It would be desirable that all members of the Coordinating Commission do not change at the same time. The position demands a shared experience which is the fruit of several years of experience.
- The US and CAN Regions requested that the Coordination Commission establish, in advance, the priorities for each day and the topics to be dealt with during a given day. They suggested that a schedule is displayed well in advance which would give the capitulants time to reflect on forthcoming topics on the agenda. Not knowing what the day's program until just before the sessions begin is not conducive to a calm and fruitful approach to the day.

#### VOTE 40

WE WISH THAT THE QUESTION OF THE NUMBER OF MANDATES FOR THE MEMBERS OF THE COORDINATING COMMISSION BE PLACED ON THE AGENDA OF THE GENERAL CHAPTER 2017.

YES 8 NO 9 ABS 7 proposition rejected

#### 6.1.2 - Task of the Moderator

- It was requested by the region of the ISLES that clear parameters be given and monitored to facilitate exchanges so that the assembly knows clearly the topic being studied, whether it is a matter of information and/or clarification or an open debate, and how much time is allotted for any given topic.
- NED proposed hiring a professional to moderate the plenary sessions but this suggestion did not generate enthusiasm; ORIENS had taken a contrary vote, asking that the Chapter be conducted without the assistance of outside experts. For some,

the main concern was to lighten the burden of the Coordinating Commission, but it was pointed out that having outsiders might increase their workload by making it necessary to explain everything to them beforehand. The big question remains: Do we really need that to improve the functioning of the Chapter? (See 9.8.1 p.39, vote 65)

## 6.2 - Power of the Commissions

- Some Regions (RéCiF- REI) took a vote to request that with regard to the mandate and authority of the Commissions of the General Chapter that from now on we use the same procedure as the 2014 General Chapter (the Commissions of the General Chapter do not have decision-making power).
- The text is already written; it was established after the vote of the 2014 General Chapter and is located in the “Study of the House Reports of the General Chapter 2014 – Ed modified” (See Appendix I p.47-48) It seems that a majority of Regions supported this procedure: it will appear in the Chapter Preparation Booklet. The 2017 General Chapter will take a vote at the beginning to express its wish to renew or not to renew this procedure.

### VOTE 41

WE ACCEPT THE PROCEDURE ON THE STUDY OF THE HOUSE REPORTS AS VOTED IN AT THE GENERAL CHAPTER 2014.

YES 24

**unanimously accepted**

## 6.3 - Distribution of Members in Commissions

REMILA proposed that there be a new distribution of members of the Commissions of the General Chapter, on the other hand, ORIENS requested otherwise and wants the Commissions to remain the same!

The arguments for both requests were easy to understand:

- One being that to hear other voices and other situations may give a new perspective on various discussions.
- Also continuity and deepening of reflections on topics by working with the same Commission for several Chapters has great value.

The Abbot General and his Council are responsible for the planning of the Commissions and the complexity of this task was noted. It was noted that it was always possible to request a change of Commission for some specific reason.

## 6.4 - Presentation of Documents Prepared by Commissions

There was a proposal from the RéCiF that a standard pattern be followed for the presentation of reports to be presented in plenary sessions :

- a. a succinct presentation of the question,*
- b. the different opinions heard on the question,*
- c. the pros and cons,*
- d. the formulation of a/several concrete proposal(s),*
- e. the position and proposals of the Commission.*

This was seen as important to give clarity in reporting, and to highlight the various issues treated in the discussions of the Commissions.

- The logic and simplicity of the scheme appear to be accepted unanimously.
- It is not to be a slave of the scheme but is to be seen as an opportunity to have something more than nice ideas and impressions. If a question does not fall within this scheme obviously it may be added.
- In the "Working Booklet of the General Chapter," there are rules for the Chapter with a paragraph on the work of the secretaries of the Commissions. The type of procedure would be included in the Booklet to help the Commissions.

#### VOTE 42

WE DESIRE THAT WHEN A COMMISSION PRESENTS A QUESTION TO THE PLENARY ASSEMBLY IT BASES ITS REPORT ON THE FOLLOWING TEMPLATE:

- A. A SUCCINCT PRESENTATION OF THE QUESTION,
- B. THE DIFFERENT OPINIONS HEARD ON THE QUESTION,
- C. THE PROS AND CONS,
- D. THE FORMULATION OF A/SEVERAL CONCRETE PROPOSAL(S),
- E. THE POSITION AND PROPOSALS OF THE COMMISSION

YES 22                      NO 0                      ABS 2                      **proposition accepted**

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## 7 - PROCEDURES

Chapter III of the Regulations of the General Chapter ("Preparation Booklet General Chapter" 2014, p.90) presents the "Way to treat the points in the program." Numbers 14 and 15 detail the different procedures:

*14. The Central Commission has the competence to decide upon the appropriate procedure for examining the points of the agenda of the Chapter.*

#### **15. Procedures**

*There are three procedures:*

- 1. The **extraordinary procedure**: all the Commissions study the question.*
- 2. The **ordinary procedure**: the question is studied by four Commissions.*
- 3. The **simplified procedure**: the question is voted on immediately without preparatory work in the Commissions and without debate in the plenary session.*

### 7.1 - Extraordinary Procedure

The proposal of REI to distribute all the reports of the Commissions to the Chapter but only a summary of those 14 Regions be read to the Chapter:

- Reading numerous reports in the Aula at the end of the chapter is to some a difficult and fruitless exercise as attention has dwindled.
- The time spent reading is considerable.

But it was pointed out that:

- Topics assigned to the extraordinary procedure are important topics; so it is important that each Commission gives its opinion and that these reports be read and understood by the whole assembly.

- It would be extra work to make a synthesis of 14 reports and who would make this synthesis?
- Perhaps a better organization of the program would lessen the accumulation of the reports to be read during the last days of the General Chapter.

## 7.2 - Ordinary Procedure

### 7.2.1. - The Number of Commissions Who Study the Question of the Ordinary Procedure.

The ordinary procedure reserves the study of the question of four Commissions. Several Regions have expressed the wish that the number of 4 Commissions be updated: REI suggests 3 Commissions, representing three language groups, and CAN, USA and NED suggest 2 Commissions (USA and NED suggest it is left to Coordination Commission to determine if a subject requires more than 2 Commissions). The discussion showed that, even among the Regions that had not taken votes on this, there was a desire to go in this direction – a decreased number of Commissions for the following reasons:

- The number of 4 Commissions had been set at the time when two Chapters met; now that the Chapter is unified, it seems that two Commissions are sufficient, perhaps 3 when encountering difficult subjects.
- The number of 3 Commissions would be interesting to represent the three language groups so far the issue of language was not a criterion for assigning questions to a Commission.
- It seemed that some subjects have few controversies such as the appointments of *ad nutum* superiors or resignations, two Commissions would be sufficient and the Coordination Commission, or better the Central Commission as this is their task, could determine whether some subjects need more.
- This would simplify matters, to avoid repetition, to reduce the work and enable the better progress of the General Chapter program.

#### VOTE 43

WE WISH THAT THE QUESTIONS TREATED BY ORDINARY PROCEDURE BE ASSIGNED TO 2 COMMISSIONS UNLESS THE CENTRAL COMMISSION DECIDE OTHERWISE.

YES 15 NO 7 ABS 1 proposition accepted

[The second proposition was 3 Commissions]

[This vote 43 affects Vote 32 which asked the revision of the Votes 47 – 50 be treated by Ordinary Procedure.] (Chapter 4C – Resignation of Abbots/Abbesses p.23)

Therefore, the vote below must be taken to specify the number of Commissions that will be assigned by the Central Commission for the revision of the Votes 47-50.

#### VOTE 44

IN VIEW OF VOTE 43, WE WISH TO ENTRUST TO 4 COMMISSIONS THE REVISION OF VOTES 47-50 (OF GENERAL CHAPTER 2014) TREATED BY ORDINARY PROCEDURE.

YES 17 NO 7 ABS 0 proposition accepted

[The other option was to have 3 Commissions]

### 7.2.2 - Common Synthesis Reports

The suggestion of ORIENS to draft a common synthesis to read in the plenary assembly was not retained. It was pointed out that:

- It would require additional work on the part of the secretaries.
- It would lose the specificity of each report.
- Would be a problem for submission of votes of each Commission.

Since the option of two Commissions was selected, this suggestion is now not probably relevant.

### 7.3 - The Idea of a "Regional Procedure"

The 2014 General Chapter, ended without having managed to address all issues identified in the program, RéCiF searched for a way which may limit the amount of work at the General Chapters and made a suggestion by creating a new procedure called "Regional Procedure ": it would create more involvement of the Regional Conferences in preparation for the General Chapters and will give to the Central Commission the possibility to entrust certain matters to the Regions.

After a more extensive presentation of this proposal by the President of RéCiF (See Appendix II p.49-50), the debate began on the advantages and disadvantages that such a procedure would present:

- The proposal is new and it is necessary to take the time to reflect, personally and in Regions.
- Some Regions have their Regional Meeting just before the Chapter so it would be difficult for them to have this type of procedure for a question of the Chapter.
- Attention should be paid to the mode of integration of this structure in the work of the other Commissions and not make a parallel structure.
- It is difficult to see how it would ease the work of the General Chapter since the Regions would work as a Commission.
- The region NED has had experience in the past of this approach and then have abandoned it because its members did not see any difference with a regional meeting. If we put too much emphasis on the regional stage, we risk losing the broader view which is characteristic of the General Chapter.
- If the Central Commission or the General Chapter entrusted to the Regions a question before the General Chapter that would not be a problem. But during the Chapter, it will be more difficult: members of the same region belong to different Commissions and it will be difficult to organize.

but:

- Regions have already experienced this model since they are already involved in such a process on the reflection on the Constitution 67.
- Sometimes by studying house reports it's very difficult to understand the whole situation; if the Regions have worked on one or two houses that would be a help to understanding the background of some situations.
- There was at the Chapter of 2011 something like this procedure: the USA Region had considered the situation of one of its houses and the Commission that studied the report of this community had relied on the suggestion the USA region. Preparatory work and materials, developed by the Region before the chapter, were used by the Commissions. This helped to throw light and clarify its position.

- It could ease the work of the Commissions: if the Central Commission requests a region or several Regions to study a question, it will help the Commission who would have to address this issue at the General Chapter: it will have a report, with the results of discussions, from different Regions who have studied it. This will be helpful and enlightening also the work has been prepared even if the decisions are not taken.
- It is not a systematic procedure for all Regions in all matters.

**Vote 45**

WE WISH THAT THE "REGIONAL PROCEDURE" PROPOSED BY RECIF BE PUT ON THE AGENDA OF THE GENERAL CHAPTER 2017.

YES 12 NO 6 ABS 6 **proposition accepted**

[Votes 46 and 47 are mutually exclusive]

**VOTE 46**

WE WISH THAT THE QUESTION OF THE "REGIONAL PROCEDURE" BE TREATED BY THE EXTRAORDINARY PROCEDURE.

YES 9 NO 15 ABS 0 proposition rejected

**VOTE 47**

WE WISH THAT THE QUESTION OF THE "REGIONAL PROCEDURE" BE TREATED BY THE ORDINARY PROCEDURE.

YES 19 NO 5 ABS 0 **proposition accepted**

[The votes 48 and 49 are mutually exclusive]

**VOTE 48**

IN VIEW OF VOTE 43, WE WISH TO ENTRUST TO 4 COMMISSIONS THE QUESTION OF "REGIONAL PROCEDURE" TREATED BY ORDINARY PROCEDURE.

YES 8 NO 16 ABS 0 proposition rejected

**VOTE 49**

IN VIEW OF VOTE 43, WE WISH TO ENTRUST TO 3 COMMISSIONS THE QUESTION OF "REGIONAL PROCEDURE" TREATED BY ORDINARY PROCEDURE.

YES 11 NO 12 ABS 1 proposition rejected

[In view of Vote 43, the question of "Regional Procedure" will be entrusted to 2 Commissions]

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## 8 - NOMINATION OF MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL OF THE ABBOT GENERAL

On the nomination of Members of the Council of the Abbot General, REM proposed two votes which ask that we include this topic in the light of the 2014 experience at the General Chapter. It particularly suggested that nominations should be prepared in Regions before the Chapter and presented at the beginning of the chapter.

These votes have 2 proposals to be distinguished: preparation of nominations prepared by the Regions and nominations at the beginning of the Chapter.

### 8.1 - Preparation of Nominations by the Regions

The proposal to prepare nominations in the Regions has been strongly debated:

- Regions are more familiar with the candidates of their own Regions and this would avoid nominating unsuitable candidates.

but:

- The Regions have a limited view of their Region and of the candidates from other Regions. They would need to ask the Abbot General and his Council if these particular candidates are free.
- Even if the vote speaks only of a "preparation" of the nomination by Regions, it remains ambiguous: it is for the General Chapter to nominate and if it is done at the level of Regions it removes the right of the Chapter to do this.

### 8.2 - Nomination at the Beginning of Chapter

The nominations for Councilors to the Abbot General at the last General Chapter were made too late. Many names were given but then withdrawn by the superiors; it seems that if nominations were made at the beginning of the chapter, the chapter members have had time to reflect on the proposed names and talk with the superiors concerned to see the real possibilities. A time for dialogue and discernment could help in this situation.

#### VOTE 50

WE WISH THAT NOMINATIONS OF CANDIDATES FOR THE COUNCIL OF THE ABBOT GENERAL TAKE PLACE AT THE BEGINNING OF THE GENERAL CHAPTER.

YES      23                      NO      0                      ABS      1                      **proposition accepted**

### 8.3 - Nomination Criteria

A broader conversation is committed to re-specify the criteria for the selection of nominees. ST 84.1.A The Statute of our Constitutions was recalled: *"The council of the Abbot General is made up of five members.....These members are chosen for their competence and, among other qualities, their openness to different cultures."*

- They should be competent and open to other cultures, and it would be necessary to give the reasons for a choice at the time of the nomination, not simply a name. It

seemed to some that the nominations in some Commissions were not well prepared or taken seriously enough.

- Sometimes it is not clear whether the members of the Council are elected according to their language or their skills. We speak about French-speaking or Spanish-speaking Councilors but this is not fair for other languages.
- If the Council of the Abbot General is to be effective, it must represent the many members of the Order. We see that Chapter after Chapter – the two Councilors who are elected are English and French Councilors, then the members elected by the Abbot General's council seem to cover other areas: Spanish, Asian and African.

#### **8.4 - Can a Superior Remove the Name of a Candidate?**

Following the uncomfortable experience of many of the Chapter members during the nominations for Councilors of the Abbot General at the General Chapter of 2014 (several monks and nuns had been proposed and their superiors asked that their names be removed), it was suggested that this situation be looked into so that it does not repeat itself.

Concerning the election, however, it is good to keep in mind the balance between the right to elect and to be elected and also the situation of the community of the member elected. But it was pointed out that for this topic it is necessary to focus on the process of the nomination, not on the election.

- An earlier clarification on whether it is possible or not for a superior to withdraw the nomination of a member of his community was given in a document sent by Dom Armand and read by Dom Timothy during the session (See Appendix III p.51).
- We live under an abbot and a rule and the General Chapter must not forget that fact.
- At the last General Chapter, it was at the time of nomination and not at the time of the election, that the superiors intervened. Abbots or Abbesses did not object at the time of election but the nomination. It must be remembered, for there to be elections, we must have nominations!
- In 2014, the way nominations were done was not satisfactory; in the procedure, it is written that we must say why we propose a name. In the 2014 Chapter, this had not been done. It seems that some candidates were removed under the influence of emotions. If the reason why a name is proposed is unclear, and if the reason why a name is removed is not clarified, confusion and discontent are created.
- If the superior has the right to remove the name of a candidate, then an interval of time should be left between the nomination and when it is removed to allow discussion with the monk/nun nominated. The Superior would be asked to publicly justify the withdrawal of the nomination.

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## 9 - ORGANIZATION OF THE CHAPTER

### 9.1 - Duration of the General Chapter

Although most of the Regions did not discuss this topic at their Regional Meetings, the Region of RE thought it necessary to look at the question of the frequency of the General Chapters due to the fact of aging and the decrease in numbers in many communities some abbots and abbesses find it hard to get to the Chapters.

- The Chapter remains at the same frequency. This gives the opportunity for a better follow up of our fragile communities.
- It was brought to our attention that in the 12<sup>th</sup> Century the most distance houses did not have to go to the General Chapter every year but rather every three years. There have been different solutions in our history.
- General Chapter is the one cohesive gathering which gives unity and solidarity to our communities.
- There was a suggestion of having two types of Chapters: one plenary and one not plenary. It is a complex question because it was pointed out that everyone wants to feel represented.
- It may be wise to first study the question of a Statute or Guidelines for Fragile Communities then look further into the frequency and duration of our Chapters.

### 9.2 - First Day

With regard to the first day of the General Chapter, various Regions expressed their desires. ORIENS asked that Dom Eamon gives a presentation on his vision of the Order in the 21st Century which would be followed by a time for personal reflection and prayer followed by discussion in Commissions. Other opinions varied and options were presented. The following reflect other opinions:

- That the first day be a working day after the opening mass of the Holy Spirit even though some felt that for various reasons it is a burden to have a full working day on the first day of the General Chapter.
- Some supported the idea of having the first day a day of prayer and reflection, followed by Vespers together, on the other hand, others felt that the time given to adoration on the first day at the last chapter did not work due mainly to the place of adoration.

After all points of view were shared votes were taken:

#### VOTE 51

WE WISH THAT THE ENTIRE FIRST DAY OF THE GENERAL CHAPTER BE A WORKING DAY.

YES 6 NO 16 ABS 1 proposition rejected

#### VOTE 52

WE WISH THAT THE AFTERNOON OF THE FIRST DAY OF THE GENERAL CHAPTER BE DEDICATED TO PRAYER AND REFLECTION.

YES 6 NO 12 ABS 6 proposition rejected

#### VOTE 53

WE WISH THAT THE FIRST DAY OF THE CHAPTER BE A STRUCTURED DAY, INCLUDING, FOR EXAMPLE, A PRESENTATION BY DOM EAMON ON HIS VISION OF THE ORDER IN THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY; A TIME FOR PERSONAL REFLECTION AND PRAYER, AND A DISCUSSION IN THE COMMISSIONS.

YES 21 NO 0 ABS 3 **proposition accepted**

**VOTE 54**

WE WISH THAT ON THE FIRST DAY OF THE GENERAL CHAPTER WE HAVE VESPERS IN COMMON.

YES 13 NO 7 ABS 4 **proposition accepted**

### 9.3 - Free Day

Some Regions expressed a preference that Sunday afternoons be free and one region asked that the Wednesday be a free day which would give the opportunity to attend the papal audience.

- Some Regions requested a private audience with the Pope, on the other hand, there was a strong feeling of frustration due to the disappointment of the last chapter when the private audience was cancelled hence enthusiasm seems to have waned on this point. On two previous occasions, although we applied for a Papal Audience, we have not received one.

**VOTE 55**

WE WISH THAT SUNDAY AFTERNOONS DURING THE CHAPTER BE FREE.

YES 23 NO 0 ABS 1 **proposition accepted**

**VOTE 56**

WE WISH TO ALSO HAVE A FULL FREE DAY, IF POSSIBLE ON A WEDNESDAY.

YES 19 NO 2 ABS 3 **proposition accepted**

### 9.4 – Evaluations during the Chapter

There was a brief discussion on the number of evaluations during the general chapter, some thought that two evaluations could be useful for the Commissions to express themselves and also the could support the Coordinating Commission in their efforts to conduct the chapter. The opinion was somewhat divided due to the amount of work and the time element.

**VOTE 57**

IN THE COURSE OF THE GENERAL CHAPTER WE WISH TO HAVE TWO EVALUATIONS INCLUDING THE FINAL ONE.

YES 13 NO 9 ABS 2 **proposition accepted**

### 9.5 - Liturgy

There was a great deal of discussion on the topic of the Liturgy at the General Chapter. Four Regions had asked that various aspects of the liturgy at the Chapter be studied. Daily Eucharist and the offices of Lauds and Vespers were discussed as well as the place for these liturgical events.

#### 9.5.1 - Place for the Eucharist

There were many propositions about the place for the Eucharist:

- Many expressed the possibility of having it at Domus Pacis but in a more suitable place than a “theater-like” room.
- Perhaps on Sundays have it at Domus Pacis and on weekdays join the congregation at the Basilica but some thought that we need to be more unified for the Eucharist.
- The parish church was quite acceptable but was very expensive.

- Both pastoral and economic aspects have to be considered in making this decision.

Finally, it was felt that the Abbot General and his Council could look further into the suitability of Domus Pacis and also the possibility of the parish church. Finances may be the deciding factor in this decision.

**VOTE 58**

WE WISH THAT DURING THE WEEK WE CELEBRATE LAUDS AND MASS BY LANGUAGE GROUPS, WHILE KEEPING THE CELEBRATIONS FOR THE WHOLE ASSEMBLY FOR THE OPENING AND CLOSING OF THE CHAPTER AND FOR SUNDAYS.

YES 1 NO 23 ABS 0 proposition rejected

**VOTE 59**

WE WISH, IF POSSIBLE, TO CELEBRATE LAUDS AND THE EUCHARIST IN THE PARISH CHURCH.

YES 11 NO 10 ABS 3 proposition accepted

[In case the Vote 59 is not possible Vote 60 was taken]

**VOTE 60**

WE WISH TO CONTINUE TO CELEBRATE LAUDS AND THE DAILY EUCHARIST TOGETHER IN DOMUS PACIS, IMPROVING THE FACILITIES AS MUCH AS POSSIBLE.

YES 23 NO 0 ABS 1 proposition accepted

### 9.5.2 - Divine Office

The Regions of REMILA and ISLES asked the Central Commission to look into the following suggestions:

- That Lauds and mass be held in language groups while keeping the celebrations for the opening and closing of the chapter for the whole assembly together.
- On weekdays celebrate Lauds by language groups and Vespers together.
- Some wanted Lauds integrated with mass with the whole assembly.

**VOTE 61**

WE WISH TO CONTINUE TO CELEBRATE VESPERS IN LANGUAGE GROUPS.

YES 18 NO 2 ABS 4 proposition accepted

[This vote was not taken because Vote 59 was taken and accepted]

WE WISH THAT ON WEEKDAYS WE CELEBRATE LAUDS BY LANGUAGE GROUPS, AND VESPERS ALL TOGETHER.

## 9.6 - Guests at the General Chapter

### 9.6.1. - Invited Guests

The following Regions submitted points to be discussed as to the presence of invited guests to our General Chapter 2017 and the topics they would be asked to speak on while there. There were strong opinions as to the amount of time given if the guests are asked to speak. There was a strong feeling that we should limit the time given to guests but on the other hand, we were reminded that 'hospitality' is one of our charism's and this needed to be kept in mind when inviting guests.

Suggestions for who would be invited and, if addressing the Assembly, what time would be given to guest speakers.

**Suggested guests:**

Archbishop José Rodríguez Carballo, O.F.M

Dom Notker Wolf, Abbot Primate of the Benedictine Congregations., Secretary of CIVCSVA

Fr Mauro-Giuseppe Lepori, Abbot General O.Cist.

M. M. Noëlla, Prioress General of the Bernardines of Oudenaarde

M. Mary Helen, Prioress General of the Bernardines of Esquermes

As to the time given for guest speakers many opinions were expressed:

- The best way to approach this is to have a day for invited guests but limit them to the monastic family, which includes O.Cist all the way down to the Lay Associates.
- If we invite a guest, we do not necessarily need to ask them to address the Assembly.
- In morning Conferences – Archbishop Carballo and Dom Mauro and in the afternoon sessions, all other invited guests. This will facilitate our desire to regulate the limit given to guests.
- Limit their presence to a single afternoon.
- It would be appreciated if a theme was chosen to be the center of talks which they may have been invited to give.
- Maybe a panel after the talk to discuss the topic given.

**9.6.2 - Lay Cistercians**

The question of the presence of the Lay Cistercians was discussed in some Regional Meetings. Some thought that they be invited to the General Chapters but not every Chapter, just from time to time. Others asked that their representatives be invited to each Chapter to foster personal contacts but not to address the Chapter each time. The negative and positive reasons were then given as to their presence at our General Chapters.

- While some Regions welcomed their presence at the General Chapter it was firmly stated by some that it was not appropriate for them to be present at the Commission meetings or during delicate subjects being discussed in the Aula. What are the criteria for their presence?
- If we have important occasions invite them for a day but not every Chapter.

from another perspective:

- They are part of the Cistercian family in the broad sense so it would be appropriate to invite them the same day as other guest speakers.
- The possibility of some Cistercian monks and nuns attending their International Meetings would certainly show more solidarity with them and be enriching for all.
- The involvement of laity is a new phenomenon in the church and therefore it seems in keeping with the desires of the Church. On one hand we look to the new horizons of the Church but on the other hand, we hesitate.
- Hospitality being one a strong charism of ours, it would seem that we should welcome their presence at least with the other invited guests.

Finally, it was thought that the best people to choose the guests and guest speakers to the General Chapter were the members of the General Council.

Two votes were taken on these two aspects of Invited Guests:

**VOTE 62**

WE DELEGATE TO THE ABBOT GENERAL AND HIS COUNCIL THE CHOICE OF INVITED GUESTS TO THE GENERAL CHAPTER AND THEIR MANNER OF PARTICIPATION.

YES 20 NO 0 ABS 4 **proposition accepted**

**VOTE 63**

WE WISH THAT THE GUESTS ADDRESS THE THEME OF “THE MONASTIC CHARISM FOR THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY.

YES 21 NO 0 ABS 3 **proposition accepted**

**Addition proposed for the Procedures of the Central Commission Meeting:**

To avoid taking a vote at each Central Commission Meeting, which delegates to the Abbot General and his Council the choice of invited guests to the General Chapter, an addition was proposed in the Procedures of the General Chapter.

**VOTE 64**

WE WISH TO ADD TO THE PROCEDURE FOR THE CENTRAL COMMISSION MEETING, A1B ‘ADVISING THE ABBOT GENERAL AND HIS COUNCIL IN THE CHOICE OF GUESTS TO BE INVITED TO THE GENERAL CHAPTER’.

YES 21 NO 0 ABS 3 **proposition accepted**

Below is the text of A1b with the new addition:

**A. PURPOSE AND PROGRAM OF THE MEETING**

*1. Purpose of the Meeting*

*a) The purpose of the Central Commission meeting is to prepare the General Chapter.*

*b) This work consists in:*

- *Coordinating the initiatives of the regional conferences (ST 80.E).*
- *Establishing the Program of the General Chapter.*
- *Deciding how the questions on the Program will be prepared before the General Chapter and assigning a suitable procedure for treating the questions during the General Chapter.*
- *Providing for the material organization of the General Chapter.*
- *Advising the abbot general and his council in the choice of guests to be invited to the general chapter.*

**9.7 - Personnel for the General Chapter**

After a quick overview of the different services provided for the General Chapter (coordinator of the secretariat, interpreters, translators, persons who are able to quickly translate texts sent by e-mail while remaining in their monasteries, secretary and typist for the three major languages, coordinator of the secretaries of the minutes, cellarer, a person responsible for the photocopying, an IT person who also takes care of the blog for the Chapter, someone who takes charge of the liturgy and sacristy). Some monks and nuns have been proposed for one or other of these tasks. Regions will continue to think about it and may propose names to the Abbot General and his Council.





### 9.8.2 Technical Improvement

REM asked that we make more use of audiovisual aids in the plenary assembly. During the discussion, the following observations were made which would help facilitate this proposal. In fact, two aspects emerged in the discussion:

- Proposals were basically referring to a greater use of a projection, which was the original thought of REM Region. This would eliminate the accumulation of papers and would make the voting more efficient.
- But this discussion led to the further use of electronic devices at the General Chapter and to the fact that we must look into functioning electronically in the future if this is advisable. It would, however, take the time to prepare the assembly to function effectively. Training would be involved.
- It would be advisable to form a group to study this question to ascertain if it would be feasible within the present situation of Domus Pacis.

#### VOTE 66

WE ASK THE ABBOT GENERAL AND HIS COUNCIL TO GET INFORMATION ON THE USE OF INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY FOR THE GENERAL CHAPTER.

YES 18 NO 2 ABS 4 **proposition accepted**

#### VOTE 67

WE WISH TO ENCOURAGE THE USE OF AUDIOVISUAL FOR THE PRESENTATION OF VOTES, NOMINATIONS, ETC. DURING THE GENERAL CHAPTER.

YES 24 **unanimously accepted**

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# PLENARY COUNCIL OF THE ABBOT GENERAL

The Statute 80.I of our Constitutions mentions: “When in session the Central Commission acts as the plenary council of the Abbot General, who consults it in the cases mentioned in ST 84.1.C.” During the Central Commission Meeting, the Abbot General met with his Plenary Council to consult with them about the points below.

## 10 - THE MARIJA ZVIJEZDA COMMUNITY IN BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

A report on the Community was given to members of the Central Commission.

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## 11 – TIBHIRINE

Votes of REM alerted the Abbot General and his Council of the situation of the property of Tibhirine. To help the community of Midelt without delay in its discernment, the Abbot General, after asking Dom Eric of Aiguebelle (the substitute of REM) to explain the situation to the members of the Central Commission, decided to take a vote of the Plenary Council.

### 11.1 Votes taken by REM

*We favor the idea that all possible efforts be made so that our order can keep the property of the monastery of Atlas at Tibhirine.*

*Given the importance of the patrimony of Atlas for the whole order, and in particular for our region, we request that the community of Midelt be aided in making a decision on the ultimate fate of the property of Tibhirine.*

*We ask the central Commission to study this question with a view to putting it on the program of the next general chapter.*

*(REM 2016 – 12 yes, unanimous for the 3 votes)*

### 11.2 Presentation of the votes of REM - Dom Eric, Aiguebelle (Substitute for the REM)

I would like to begin with a brief history of the question to help you understand why the REM took this vote. The property of Tibhirine, buildings, and land, according to Algerian law, belongs to an organization, the ACCRCA, which groups together all the Church’s property in Algeria. But canonically, the owner of Tibhirine remains the community of Our Lady of Atlas, transferred to Midelt, Morocco. Up to the present, the diocese of Algiers has managed the property of Tibhirine;

for the last few years this has been carried out by a priest of the Mission de France, Fr. Jean-Marie Lassausse. During the last few months, plans are in the works for the possible occupation of Tibhirine by the Chemin Neuf, a new religious community based in France. In order to facilitate this project, the present Administrator of the Archdiocese of Algiers, Mgr. Desfarges requested that the community of Atlas give or sell the property of Tibhirine to the Chemin Neuf, or at least to the Archdiocese of Algiers. After receiving this request, the brothers of Midelt contacted our Abbot General. Their desire is that the property of Tibhirine remain within the Order but, before making a decision, they would like to know whether or not it is important for the Order to retain the patrimony that is Tibhirine. And what other way is there of knowing the mind of the Order than the General Chapter?

After discussions with the Abbot General, the brothers of Atlas understood that if the Conventual Chapter took a canonical vote to hold on to the property of Tibhirine, which is what they want to do, then the matter would end there: there would be no reason to refer the matter to the General Chapter. In order for this question to be brought before the Chapter, the community of Atlas would have to decide to donate or sell the property of Tibhirine; then the matter would normally be referred to the General Chapter. This is how Dom Jean-Pierre explained the matter to us at the REM. But how could the community of Atlas take such a vote (to donate the property of Tibhirine) without knowing the Order's opinion on the matter, since the patrimony that Tibhirine represents concerns us all? This is the reason behind the three votes taken by the REM: to allow the community of Atlas to know what the Order thinks without having to take a vote that "goes against the grain".

Since the REM meeting, Dom Jean-Pierre met with Mgr. Desfarges, Administrator for the Diocese of Algiers. Two new points have come up. Firstly, the situation is now somewhat urgent: Fr. Jean-Marie Lassausse, who had been managing the property of Tibhirine until now, was not able to renew his residence permit and is stuck at Tibhirine. Secondly, Mgr. Desfarges is now willing to sign a contract with the community of Atlas, who would confide the management of the property of Tibhirine to the Diocese for 15 years, maintaining the right to give its opinion before any major changes were made to the configuration of the buildings and before any decisions were made regarding the cemetery.

Nevertheless, there remain many unknowns: the attitude of the future Bishop of Algiers, the possibility (or lack thereof) of the Chemin Neuf occupying Tibhirine (given the security conditions imposed by the government of Algeria), etc. Hence the request for the brothers of Atlas to know the Order's mind on the patrimony of Tibhirine.

### 11.3 Voting Plenary Council of the Abbot General

**VOTE 68** of the Central Commission acting as the Plenary Council of the Abbot General.

THE CENTRAL COMMISSION, ACTING AS THE PLENARY COUNCIL OF THE ABBOT GENERAL, EXPRESSED ITS MORAL SUPPORT FOR THE COMMUNITY OF OUR LADY OF ATLAS IN THE STEPS IT IS TAKING TO PRESERVE CANONICAL OWNERSHIP OF THE PROPERTY OF THE MONASTERY OF TIBHIRINE, AS WELL AS, FOR ITS PROJECT TO DRAW UP A CONTRACT WITH THE ARCHDIOCESE OF ALGIERS, WHICH CONFIDES TO THE ARCHDIOCESE THE MANAGEMENT OF TIBHIRINE FOR THE NEXT FIFTEEN YEARS.

YES 24

**unanimously accepted**

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## **12 - PROPOSITION ABOUT THE ELECTION OF THE CENTRAL SECRETARY FOR FORMATION.**

The Central Secretary for Formation is elected every 3 years. Sister Marie was elected at the Central Commission which was held at the end of the General Chapter of 2014 and her mandate will finish at the end of the General Chapter of 2017. There will be a new election to confirm her mandate or to elect someone else.

In assessing the vote for the Central Secretary for Formation it was seen that it was held at the end of the Chapter. It appears that the timing of the election may be unsuitable: the fatigue and lack of attention and creativity make the process cumbersome and disappointing. This does not undermine the election of Sister Marie because it seems that everyone is very happy with her work and there has been a lot of positive feedback on the work she embraced with enthusiasm and dedication.

It might be a good thing that the election of the Central Secretary for Formation takes place during the Central Commission Meeting before the Chapter: it would allow members of the Central Commission to take more time to think, talk and prepare for the vote.

**VOTE 69** of the Central Commission acting as the Plenary Council of the Abbot General.

WE ARE FAVOURABLE TO THE PROPOSAL OF THE ABBOT GENERAL CONCERNING THE ELECTION OF THE CENTRAL SECRETARY OF FORMATION: THE ELECTION WILL OCCUR DURING THE MEETING OF THE CENTRAL COMMISSION, THAT TAKES PLACE BEFORE THE GENERAL CHAPTER, NOT THE ONE IMMEDIATELY FOLLOWING THE GENERAL CHAPTER.

YES 24

**unanimously accepted**

The mandate of Sister Marie will end at the Central Commission which will be held after the General Chapter of 2017 and the Coordination Commission proposed that the 2016 Central Commission should take a vote to extend her mandate to the Central Commission 2019 (See Vote 70. p.44)

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## MISCELLANEOUS

### 13 - CENTRAL SECRETARY FOR FORMATION

#### 13.1 Report of the work of the Central Secretary for Formation.

Sister Marie of Val d'Igny, who was elected Central Secretary for Formation at the end of the last General Chapter (Assisi 2014), presented a report of its activities (See Appendix IV p.52-54)

#### 13.2 Extension of the mandate of Sister Marie

According to the vote of the Central Commission, acting as the Plenary Council of the Abbot General, (See Vote 69 p.43) the next election of the Central Secretary of Formation will be during the Central Commission Meeting, which is held before the General Chapter 2020. The mandate of Sister Marie needs to be extended until 2019.

#### VOTE 70

WE WISH TO PROLONG THE MANDATE OF SR MARIE OF VAL D'IGNY AS CENTRAL SECRETARY OF FORMATION UNTIL THE CENTRAL COMMISSION 2019.

YES 24

unanimously accepted

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### 14 - INFORMATION - ON HOUSES OF THE ORDER

#### 14.1 Irish Communities of Monks

Presentation by Dom Richard of Roscrea outlining the process initiated in the communities of the Irish houses after the General Chapter of 2014 (See Appendix V p.55-56)

#### 14.2 Diepenveen

Information on the community of Diepenveen (See Appendix VI p.57)

#### 14.3 Bela Vista

Information on the community of Bela Vista.

# CONCLUSION

## 15 - EVALUATION

Mt St Joseph's Abbey, Roscrea, was truly a fitting location for the Central Commission Meeting 2016. The environmental beauty which surrounded the group attending was a reflection of the beauty of the community of the Abbey.

At the end of the Central Commission Meeting, an evaluation was done by all who participated. The first and foremost point mentioned by all the participants was their deep gratitude to Dom Richard and the community of Roscrea for their warm welcome, attentiveness to our needs, and special presence of the monks with us when possible. Many, but not all due to time, had the pleasure of speaking to the community and sharing with them the same hopes and dreams we have in common with them: our life lived as Cistercians in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. We appreciated the amount of work which went into the preparation of the liturgy, and the liturgy books, which were of exceptional quality and made especially for the Central Commission Meeting. Obviously, there had been a lot of thought and work gone into this preparation. Much gratitude was also expressed for the comfortable and convenient accommodations. In general, a gift to take back to our communities was the gift of the witness that a small and fragile community has to offer our Order. Faithful, welcoming and loving.

Reflections about the meeting itself were positive from the excellent preparation of the meeting, the place of meeting, large and conveniently set up for the needs of both participants, interpreters, and secretaries. We were very grateful for the quality of our interpreters and the support we were given by our wonderful technician, Andy. The Coordinating Commission members were efficient in their moderating, listening with kindness and yet with firmness and so the programme moved along at a good pace. The atmosphere was congenial even when differing opinions were expressed. There was a definite friendly and supportive atmosphere permeating the meeting.

One event which touched the lives of all present was the death and funeral of Brother Dominic. It was lived with Cistercian simplicity, love, and dignity. Beautiful and prayerful. All present were grateful that this experience of the death and burial of one of our brothers, in a community of growing fragility, was shared by his brothers and sisters from all Regions of the Order. It was truly an experience of unity, love and brotherhood, an event which will remain with us as we walk into the unknown future together.

The Abbot General closed the meeting expressing his thanks to everyone and reminding us that, it is true that we all want to grow and want to be authentic in our vocation but we must also be aware of the challenges of our world today as related to our vocation as Cistercians.

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## **16 - CLOSING MESSAGE OF THE ABBOT GENERAL TO THE CENTRAL COMMISSION**

I thank the host community and its abbot, Dom Richard, for this time together and this place, the facilities, the welcome and the care that has been shown to us. I think it has been a very good meeting from the point of its serene, relaxed nature, and mutual respect, in terms of function and contribution to the meeting.

I am happy the Central Commission Meeting came to Ireland. Actually, I did not vote in favor of it as I thought it was too much of a burden for Dom Richard and the community, but so far he has not had a heart attack and seems to have managed quite well. I am glad I got it wrong and that we have come here and have had this experience. From Central Commission Meeting we move on to the General Chapter. I think we all realize in different ways both the critical situation in many houses of the Order as well as the promise that is there also, the potential. It is good if you can get that balance right and I think that is important that we as a Central Commission and an Order become more and more aware of those other houses out there that we do not have contact with and their particular needs. I think the Central Commission can help, but the General Chapter is the locale which has the best opportunity of recognizing and treating them. I think we have to pray for the forthcoming Chapter and for our work in the meantime that we may learn to recognize the reality and to recognize that God is with us and that God's work is being done and we have to take our part in it. This is where our hope lies, not in the bad news that is all around but in the fragility as well as the strengths of our communities. I think this is an awareness we need to cultivate in terms of the world in which we live. A year ago a sister in one of the houses of the Order wrote and said to me that we really need to do something about Syria. The Pope has spoken to religious communities about the need to do something, not just to pray but to do something, and it seems to me that this dimension of the world today has to have an impact on us. We have not done anything as yet at the Generalate apart from giving donations now and then and I suppose that is not a bad thing, giving donations, but there is more to it than that in today's world. I think we all have a fear of betraying our heritage and being less than fully Cistercian, but I think we have to ask ourselves what that means in today's world and how do we help the poor at our door, and the poor today are at our door in a different way. It is a real sign of the times. It speaks, not only of the horror of war in Syria, of the suffering of the people, of the need to welcome the stranger but also of the challenge of the world of Islam today and other great religions and cultures and of our place in that world. So I think we are concerned about the Order, we want to move forward, we want to grow, we want to be authentic, but I think this dimension is part of being authentic today in today's world: how we reach the poor person, the immigrant, the refugee today who are not exactly at our doors but may well be.

With these few reflections, I would like to close this Central Commission meeting by thanking you for your participation and your presence. A safe journey home for everybody. God bless and thank you.

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# APPENDICES

## I - STUDY of THE HOUSE REPORTS at the GENERAL CHAPTER 2014 (with modifications)

### A - Writing the House Reports

**1.1** - The aim of the House Reports is to share with the whole Order the real state of the community. The community writes it with its Superior in consultation with the Father Immediate who makes sure that it gives true information on the community, instead of limiting itself to theoretical considerations.

**1.2** - In writing it, the community reflects on its own monastic experience, especially as regards formation, dealing with this question in a concrete manner, avoiding abstract considerations. The community can take its inspiration from the document that will be proposed, and may use the recent Visitation Card.

### B - Treatment of the House Reports at the General Chapter

**2.1** - The study of the House Reports is the main aspect of the collegial pastoral solicitude of the General Chapter towards the communities of the Order. The General Chapter exercises that solicitude by confiding the reading and study of these House Reports to the Commissions of the General Chapter.

**2.1.1** - After having read and discussed the Reports, the Commission dialogues with the superior. The father immediate, who always has the right to provide pertinent information to the president of the Commission that is reading the report of his daughter house, is consulted (which does not necessarily imply that he participates in the discussions). If more information is needed, the Commission contacts other members of the General Chapter who are familiar with the case in question. In both cases, the consultation may be carried out either in the presence or the absence of the Superior of the house, according to circumstances.

**2.1.2** - Care should be taken at every stage, to respect the legitimate sensitivity of the superior of the house studied and of everyone concerned. If some sensitive information needs to be given to allow for an enlightened pastoral intervention, all the participants must be aware of their duty to respect charity and confidentiality.

At the beginning of the General Chapter, after their election, the presidents, vice-presidents and secretaries of the Mixed Commissions will have a meeting with a member of the coordinating Commission in order to receive some indications on how to fulfill their tasks.

### a) Study of the House Reports by the Commissions of the General Chapter

**2.2** – Each Commission studies all the Reports assigned to it.

**2.2.1** - In that study, they will be sensitive to, for example:

- The quality of formation in every phase of monastic life.
- The effective balance between *lectio*, liturgy and work.
- The superior's pastoral care of the community. For example, the care of the aged and infirm members or of those in initial formation.
- How the community is facing certain challenges, such as that of enculturation, especially in the field of formation.
- The available means used by the superior to assure his or her own ongoing formation inner balance and growth.
- The relationship with the father immediate.
- In cases where an abbot has a large filiation, how he deals with this.

**2.2.2** - The pastoral care for the communities studied and their superiors will normally be exercised through: advice, affirmation, encouragement, recommendations and brotherly/sisterly support. The Commissions may also choose to send a message to the community concerned. Such messages are normally sent in the Commissions' name. If a Commission wishes to write a message on behalf of the entire Chapter, its text must first be approved by a vote of the Chapter.



**2.2.3** - When a Commission judges that a community requires special pastoral attention, it will always discuss the matter with the superior concerned and will consult the Father Immediate. If there is need for a specific decision, the Commission first tries to reach an agreement with the local superior, the Father Immediate, and—when appropriate—the Abbot General. In such cases, the Commission's role is mainly consultative: the actual decisions are made and carried out by the persons who have the authority to do so.

**2.2.4** - If, in exercising pastoral care for the community and its superior, the Commission (with or without the aid of an *ad hoc* Commission) is unable to reach an agreement with the competent persons regarding the recommendations it proposes or if these recommendations are not within the competence of the parties involved, the matter may be brought to the attention of the General Chapter. A majority vote of members of the Commission is required in order to take this step. It then consults the Abbot General and requests the Coordinating Commission to put the matter on the agenda.

**2.2.5** - In cases when the General Chapter wishes to impose a decision, a majority vote of the General Chapter is required.

**2.2.6** - It is possible for a superior to have recourse to the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life (CICLSAL) concerning a decision made by the Chapter in his own regard or that of his community.

**2.2.7** - It is the responsibility of the Commission president to communicate important matters of this kind to the plenary assembly in the manner that the Coordinating Commission will judge opportune. The persons involved should be made aware beforehand of what information will be given to the Chapter.

**2.2.8** - Each commission makes a report offering a general picture of the communities it has studied. In this report mention can be made of particular aspects or common features which could be of interest to the whole Order, especially in the area of formation.

#### **b) Situations Requiring a Special Pastoral Attention**

**2.3.1** - There may be situations that invite further pastoral care due to the fact that: the pastoral care of the commission is not accepted by the persons involved; more time and special interventions are needed in complicated situations.

**2.3.2** - In such cases, the Commission, in consultation with the Abbot General and his Council, may create an *ad hoc* commission that will be composed of persons chosen for their experience and their capacity to intervene in that particular situation. The findings of the *ad hoc* commission will be brought to the Commission, which will then make the necessary recommendations.

**2.3.3** - The following-up of the decisions taken by the Chapter will normally be made by the Father Immediate; if this is not opportune the Abbot General and his Council will be responsible for the following-up.

#### **c) The Communication of Information**

**2.4** - The secretaries of the commissions will regularly give to the secretary of the coordinating commission a report on the progress of their work on the House Reports.

**2.5** - A member of the council of the abbot general will serve as liaison between the abbot general and the coordinating commission.

**2.6** - The reports of the commissions, at the end of their work, will be communicated to the plenary assembly in the form judged most opportune by the coordinating commission.

**2.7** - The secretaries of the commissions having finished their work of the General Chapter will give to the coordinating commission all the documentation that has been worked on in the mixed commissions.

**2.8** - All the documents established by the Commissions of the Chapter will be presented to the persons who are concerned – Superior, Father Immediate – as well as to the Abbot General, before being presented in Plenary Session.

**2.9** - At the end of the General Chapter, the secretary of the coordinating commission will give to the abbot general a complete documentation concerning the work of the General Chapter.

#### **d) Synthesis of the General Chapter**

**3.1** - A document will be written after the General Chapter, the redaction of which will be entrusted to two members of the General Chapter (an abbot and an abbess), elected by the General Chapter at the beginning of its work. The Abbot General and his Council will approve it.

**3.2** - This document will. Be a synthesis of the work of the General Chapter and of its most significant points.

## II - REGIONAL PROCEDURE

All of us are aware that not all questions on the program could be dealt with at the 2014 General Chapter. This fact can be explained in different ways, chiefly by reference to lack of time. But this was not the only reason.

Would the Chapter not profit more by finding a new way to carry out its work, rather than by concentrating on finding some bits and pieces of time here and there? The Procedures already in use should certainly be maintained and are not incompatible with a new manner of working that could make it possible to divide the workload. This would alleviate both the work of the Commissions and the meetings in plenary assembly.

### Regional Procedure

The term "Regional" is used because it involves the Regional Conferences. It is put in motion on the level of the Regions with a view to preparing and facilitating the General Chapter. As such, study carried out on a regional level can be the object of one or several votes of orientation for the General Chapter. Regional Procedure would not give the Regional Conferences any other power than that of taking one or several votes that would be useful for the General Chapter. This would permit them to give opinions as is already the case, but the opinions of the Regions at the present time often stop short at the level of the Central Commission (except by writing a letter or by sending a document to the Mixed Commissions.) The Regional Procedure would open the door of the General Chapter to the Regions in a collegial manner.

### Objectives

1. To lighten the workload of the Commissions of the Chapter.
2. To save time by anticipation, and by dividing the workload in a different way with a view to favoring greater collegial input during the Chapter.
3. On the basis of the study of one or several dossiers, to permit the Regional Conferences to offer an opinion that the General Chapter (and not only several Mixed Commissions) will have to take into consideration.

### Implementation of the Regional Procedure

1. As in the case of the other Procedures after it is approved by the Chapter, the Regional Procedure can begin functioning at the discretion of the Central Commission.
2. It can be implemented when the General Chapter is not in session, but also, if need be, during the General Chapter (*supposing that this has been provided for by the Regulations*).
3. The Central Commission chooses a question or a concrete situation, that would normally be assigned to the Commissions of the General Chapter, and asks at least two Regions, or possibly three, to make as complete a study of it as possible. (*It goes without saying that documents necessary for such a study are to be provided to the Regions in question.*)
4. When the study concerns a precise house, the Region to which this house belongs must be consulted in addition to the two or three Commissions mentioned in point 3.
5. The Central Commission may assign the study of a question or of a situation to all the Regions, before or during the Chapter.

### Extent of the role of the Regions

By introducing a "Regional Procedure" the General Chapter would recognize in an official way the broader role of the Regions in the General Chapter's deliberations, over and above the power that they already have, namely, of proposing to the Central Commission the questions to be placed on the program of the Chapter.

Thanks to this new Procedure, the Regions would have the ability, if need be, to vote *during* the General Chapter. This possibility of "capitular vote" would apply in a way that is already the case with the Commissions in virtue of the Procedures approved by the General Chapter. Thus, since Regional Procedure could only function in connection with the General Chapter and in a limited way, the risk of evolving in the direction of a "structure of Congregations" would be avoided. (1<sup>st</sup> Commission of the MGM of 2008)

### Examples of Questions which could be studied by Regional Procedure

- *First example: Having only one type of priory*

The General Chapter of 2011 had asked the Law Commission to draw up a document on this question. This appeared in the *Workbook of the General Chapter of 2014*, VIII.2, p. 33ff). The subject was to be treated by all

the Commissions (namely by Extraordinary Procedure) at the General Chapter of 2014. Because of lack of time this never happened.

Had Regional Procedure existed, the Central Commission would have been able to ask all the Regions to study this question and to send to the Generalate before the General Chapter a concise report based on a reasoned opinion. The opinions of all the Regions presented together in a single document would have been sent to all the Commissions when the Chapter met. When it came time to study the results by extraordinary Procedure, the Commissions would have thus benefited from the reflection and opinion of all the Regions. This would have been a considerable gain in energy and in time.

In this precise case, the Regions would not have worked in place of the Commissions but would have furnished them with informative arguments permitting them to express an opinion, a proposition, a suggestion or even to take a decisive vote on the matter. As the question has not yet been treated, it is not too late to try.

Other examples could be suggested to call upon the Regions in the same way. If the interest of the Regions were won over in this way, they would also be able to communicate this interest to the communities themselves.

Finally, it is worth asking ourselves if a “new way of working,” of which the Regional Procedure is an example, could be introduced into the General Chapter, because it is clear that the questions to be treated are more and more complex and consequently require more time. The methods of dealing with them that functioned well in the past now function less well and call for improvement.

Fr. Jean-Marc  
of Bellefontaine



### III - "COULD THE GENERAL CHAPTER ELECT SOMEONE AS COUNCILOR EVEN IF HIS/HER SUPERIOR DOES NOT AGREE?" A response from Dom Armand Veilleux of Scourmont

**When a monk is elected as Abbot or Superior of another house, can his abbot block the election? – The answer is clearly "NO".**

That question was raised once when I was Procurator. I consulted Father Torres at the CIVCSVA, and he gave me that negative answer. I asked him what was the juridical basis for that answer. His explanation was the following. "Your Constitutions say clearly that "Any brother who has made profession in the Order can be elected abbot..." (Stat. 39.3.B). That Statute gives every monk the **right** to be elected in any monastery of the Order. His abbot cannot deprive him of that **right** given to him by your Constitutions)".

That seems to me quite clear.

Of course, before accepting the election, the monk will have to make a discernment. In that discernment he will have to take into account the needs of this own community as well as the needs of the community that has elected him. And, since he is a monk under a rule and an abbot, it would be normal for him to make that discernment with his abbot. But, in the end, the decision to accept or to refuse the election will be entirely his, and not the abbot's decision.

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The thing is different for the nomination of a Superior *ad nutum*. Nothing in the Constitutions gives to all the monks the right to be appointed Superior *ad nutum*. If a Father Immediate wants to appoint a monk from a monastery other than his as Superior *ad nutum* of one of his daughter houses, he needs the agreement of the Superior of that monk.

When a monk, with the agreement of his abbot, accepts to become superior *ad nutum*, he becomes a "major superior", and, therefore, he is no longer under the authority of his own abbot. He will be again under the authority of his own abbot, when his mandate as superior *ad nutum* ends.

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The situation is similar with the election of a Councilor of the Abbot General.

Our constant practice has been that a monk (or a nun) is not nominated to that position if his/her superior does not agree.

Now, one could ask the question : "Could the General Chapter elect someone as Councilor even if his/her Superior does not agree?" That could probably be discussed, by don't think it could. The monk is "under an abbot" (and the nun "under an abbess"), and the General Chapter cannot intervene in the internal life of a community. I can see some arguments for the opposite answer. But this question is certainly purely theoretical. I don't see how a region would nominate someone and how the General Chapter would elect that person, if it is known that his abbot is opposed.

Fr. Armand Veilleux

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## IV - OVERVIEW OF THE CENTRAL SECRETARY FOR FORMATION'S WORK

Central Commission at Roscrea June, 2016

I was touched by Dom Eamon's invitation to meet with you here and am very grateful for the opportunity to do so. Our meeting gives me the chance to make contact with all the regions of the Order and, at the mid-point of my mandate, to adjust or correct the direction my work is taking.

Outline of my work to date

At the end of the last General Chapter, I was given some general directions: "draw up a list of persons who would be able to contribute (by their teaching or by other means) to helping communities in need", and "discover the needs of the various Regions". Consequently, I began my service with a sent to every superior regarding what their communities would be able to contribute and what their needs were in the area of formation. I received 44 replies, which allowed me to draw up a list of around 30 brothers and sisters whose superiors were willing to make them available for formation outside of their own communities and, in some cases, outside of their own regions.

Among the suggestions I received, the idea of publishing a newsletter, in order to improve the circulation of news about formation throughout the Order, which would help, as one abbess very aptly said, "to disseminate thought".

In order to create links with our 15 regional secretaries, I sent out two general letters. They were very well received, and all the brothers and sisters are working, each in his/her own way, toward the goal of sharing news. My greatest handicap is my complete ignorance of the Spanish language, which is a singular disadvantage for the Spanish-speaking parts of the Order, and for which I am very sorry.

Last August, at the request of the ReCif, I called a meeting of the regional secretaries for the RéCif, REI and CNE so that, together, we could come up with a new formula for the sessions organised in these regions. The meeting was good and fruitful.

Contacts made outside of the Order

- At the beginning of my mandate, Dom Eamon advised me to include the Cistercian Congregation of St. Bernard in Spain in our exchange of news. As you will have noted in the newsletters, Mother Maria Angeles is happy to participate.
- As for the Order of Cîteaux, I asked Dom Mauro whether he thought an exchange of news with our order would be possible. He told me that, not being as centralised as we are, they had no one in particular who could channel news, but that he would make himself available for exchanges. Let me assure you that I have neither used nor abused his availability! Contact with the Order of Cîteaux in the area of formation takes place on many other occasions, for example during sessions for francophone and germanophone formators, for which one of our regional secretaries has been acting as contact person for many years and with great competence. We have two occasional contacts with the Order of Cîteaux: with Mother Anne-Emmanuelle of Blauvac, an initiative of one of our abbots who was visiting the sisters; and Father Jean-Marie of Sénanque, whom we met at the ReCif regional meeting.
- At the same meeting, Mother Michèle of the monastery of la Merci Dieu also expressed her desire to receive news.
- Quite recently, contacts were made with our Bernardine Sisters of Esquermes and Oudennaarde at the initiative of Mother Noëlla, who was interested by the newsletters she saw on the website.
- Dom Jean-Pierre Longeat, whom I met at the beginning of my mandate, would have liked us to draw up a table of monastic formation in the different regions of the world, to be based on the exchanges we had with his collaborators at the A.I.M. – an attractive goal, but one that requires time! Up to the present, I have made preliminary contacts with the 18 regional collaborators of the A.I.M. and have published the three responses I received in the latest newsletter.
- Regarding the Lay Cistercians in France, on the occasion of the festivities surrounding Clairvaux 2015, an exchange took place with La Grange de Clairvaux. I must admit that a lack of time has forced me to keep my distance from this project. Nevertheless, together with the secretary of the ARCCIS, we regularly exchange news and the Cerccis Centre for Documentation at Cîteaux has very generously collaborated with us in view of setting up a DVD library. But, in the end, we had to give up the project.

- A certain number of exchanges also took place with local formators, even superiors, who were looking for information, an on-line course, a text, etc.

Most of the essential contacts having been made, having found a channel through which to circulate information, the period between the two General Chapters seemed to be an appropriate time for a deeper reflection with the regional secretaries: how can we get our regions to work on the intuitions that came out of the last General Chapter in the area of formation? Also, last summer, thanks to the generous confidence of superiors from various regions of our Order, we were able to publish the booklet entitled “Steps Forward.” This collection of texts, that a whole team of translators worked on – even two of the authors lent a hand – was received with enthusiasm. An Italian translation soon followed. Almost all the regional secretaries were interested in doing a follow-up to these texts, but only two of them actually committed themselves to collaborating. I had made a few contacts on my own, but the whole structure, depending on only three people, was very fragile, so I was forced to terminate our exchanges after only a few weeks. The two regional secretaries, Sr. Maria Francesca (REM) and Br. Cassian (USA), given their own work loads, felt relieved by this decision, “at least for the moment”, as concluded our Italian secretary.

I have spent a great deal of time looking for translators. Two Japanese communities expressed this need in my first survey. Many different approaches were tried – one professional translator (French to Japanese) gave me her rates: a minimum of 0.10 Euro per word, which works out to 35 Euro for a text the length of a normal letter! We can, therefore, only afford to rely on volunteers. Furthermore, the search for translators has been very difficult in Europe. Sr. Michaël Takahashi, who worked at our last General Chapter, volunteered her services. She has agreed to translate a few texts, time permitting.

Presently, I am looking for help with the translation of texts in Italian by Dom Romano Bottegal, which Dom Lino sent me. For her part, Sr. Magdalena (secretary of the REI), sent me a series of papers written in German, which form part of her work in collaboration with the Order of Cîteaux. Certain texts appended to the newsletter are worth translating.

This work occupies almost all of the five hours per week I have been given to do this job. Finally, to conclude this first part of my report, I would like to share with you the watchword given to me by the CNE regional meeting: slow down!

Questions/Problems met during my work

### **1. Collaboration with our team of regional secretaries.**

It is going well. There are very dynamic regions who always attend our meetings; it is a real pleasure to work with their secretaries because I know I can count on them. In their own regions, local formators are also involved. Sometimes they ask me to send a copy of the newsletter in another language to a group of their formators, or else they refer one or another of them to me for information.

The principle of subsidiarity demands that, if personal contact with each of the regional secretaries for formation does not work, and local news is not transmitted to the central secretary, this region then becomes excluded from Order-wide exchanges. The responsibility of the regional secretary to work with the central secretary may not always be very clear to everyone who accepts this position.

I think the ideal situation would be that regional secretaries get to know each other better and that we be able to reflect together on the challenges we face. For example: how can we maintain our enthusiasm for and commitment to the quality of formation in our regions year-long, even outside of our meetings during sessions? How can we continue our work once we have returned to our communities?

### **2. A type of formation accessible to all brothers and sisters.**

My experience of two French regional meetings (ReCIF and CNE) has reinforced my conviction that it would be good to come up with a simple proposal for the continuing formation of brothers and sisters of all ages – something along the lines of a return to our roots, that would encourage individuals to study and do *lectio*. This would require a support team in order to plan this project. Is it idealistic to propose a formation programme accessible to all? Is this of interest to only one region?

### **3. Sharing various works written by our brothers and sisters.**

- University level: Fr. Martin of Val Notre-Dame has made the thesis he wrote for his license in theology (The Liturgy of the Hours: a sacramental and mystical celebration), presented in February 2014 at

the Institute for Advanced Studies in Liturgy of the Catholic Institute of Paris; Fr. Germain of Koutaba has promised to share his doctoral thesis in canon law with us (The Relationship between person and institute in religious life, defended at Strasbourg in April 2014) as soon as he has completed the corrections necessary for publication; might Dom Guillaume agree to share his thesis on Cassian? There are probably other resources. We mentioned the possibility of publishing these works on the reserved part of our website. Would this be good for everyone involved: authors and potential readers?

- Work in progress in certain regions: for example, in the USA region there is a group, Cistercian Mentors, which is working on the Cistercian Fathers through internet exchanges; would this be of interest to people in other regions?

#### **4. The most important questions for me**

- How to encourage collaboration among the regions? How do we make people conscious of the fact that our differences are our greatest treasure? More fundamentally, how can we persuade a certain region or a certain community that others are really interested in what they are doing in the area of formation?
- Formation by internet: this medium offers great possibilities, but is it really the best way to give an “integral and mystical” formation? Are there people available in our houses to oversee such a programme in their own houses? Would this be a good tool for learning how to think?
- What could the central secretary for formation do that would be helpful in your region? What about for the whole Order?

What is really enthralling about the task of the central secretary for formation is the hope that, with few means, imperceptibly, the circulation of news among our communities helps to build links of communion within the Order, and perhaps even beyond it. It is worth the trouble!

*THANK-YOU*

Sr. Marie  
Abbey of Our Lady of Val d'Igny



## V - REPORT ON THE PROCESS OF THE IRISH HOUSES

Central Commission – Roscrea – June 2016

At the General Chapter of 2014 two votes were taken concerning the Irish Houses of Monks – votes 54 and 55 – one which approved the proposal of the *ad hoc* commission created to examine their situation and the other which encouraged the monks of these houses to enter into the project.

The project was titled “*A Community of Communities*” and proposed that the five communities, while remaining at their present locations for the moment, would form a single canonical entity with centralized leadership, formation and administration/economic structure. A ‘college’ of abbots was created to support the abbot of Roscrea and regular reports of the progress of this project were to be given to the Abbot General and his Council, and a full report to be given to the General Chapter of 2017.

For those not familiar with it, a brief history of the process among the Irish Houses may be helpful. In 2006, the issue of the future of the Irish houses of monks was first raised at a meeting of superiors. This was followed by a presentation of statistics at the Regional Meeting in 2007. At the MGM of 2008 the 6<sup>th</sup> Commission encouraged the communities to continue their process of reflection and recommended external help to facilitate their discernment. Later that year, Nunraw joined the process and a facilitator was appointed to be involved. At the General Chapter of 2011 ‘Guidelines’ to aid the process were presented to the abbots by the Presidents of the four Commissions who examined the house reports of the communities concerned and suggesting Sr Josephine Mary Miller of the Bernardines d’Esquermes as facilitator for the process.

In February 2012, the report *The Future of Male Cistercian Life in Ireland and Scotland* was produced and circulated to the six communities. Throughout 2012 there were meetings held in the six monasteries concerned. Communities were asked to look honestly and comprehensively at their own situations and were provided with questions to guide these discussions. Throughout 2013 there were ongoing meetings of the six Abbots with Sr Josephine Mary and a meeting was held in Dublin for the younger monks of the communities involved (born in or after 1950) – 18 monks attended. In January 2014 a report was issued from the meetings of the Abbots and Sr Josephine Mary which concluded ‘As we have journeyed through this process over the last two years there has been a growing realisation that the situation is very complicated – solutions are not obvious.’

At the General Chapter of 2014 the three commissions who examined the house reports of the monasteries requested the creation of an ad-hoc commission for the Irish Houses (Nunraw had previously decided to cease its participation in the process) and the project “*A Community of Communities*” was proposed.

During the nine months following the General Chapter of 2014 each of the five communities of monks discussed the proposal of the Chapter in their respective monasteries, with the assistance of different members of the College, and by August of 2015 all communities had taken a ‘vote of intent’ on the proposal. The communities of Mt Melleray, Mt St Joseph, Mellifont and Bethlehem all voted to move in the direction proposed by the General Chapter, to continue to seek ways in which they can cooperate with the other Cistercian houses in Ireland to consolidate resources and to ensure the best possible formation for new candidates. By this vote the communities indicated that they are open to envisaging new structures to ensure future of Cistercian life in Ireland. The community of Bolton voted not to pursue the proposal of the General Chapter at this time.

The College then called a meeting of the four communities concerned to bring the process to the next stage. In order to help prepare the communities and to give the meeting a focus, a series of questions had been circulated in advance and each community had sent a response/report which was shared with the other communities participating in the meeting.

Mother Josephine Mary was the facilitator for this meeting which was held in Dublin at the end of November 2015. The venue was chosen because of its ‘central’ location, though the monks of Mt Melleray had a journey of nearly 3 hours to get there! There were 33 monks present from the four communities, including the Abbot General. Dom Timothy and Dom Erik, members of the College, were present but unfortunately Dom Daniel was unable to attend.

At that meeting there were different suggestions offered about the possibilities for the future and two options for the future emerged:

- 1 The creation of a single community, with infirmary care provided for elderly and infirm members, and with the possibility of a future foundation of a community focussed on a more radical living of the monastic life.
- 2 The creation from the outset of the two communities described above – a mainstream community with infirmary care and a more ‘radical’ community for all ages.

There was significant support for further study into the viability of each of these two options and it was agreed that a Committee be established comprising a representative from each of the four communities. This



Committee working with the College appointed by the General Chapter were to explore the viability and practical implications of the two options and formulate a report that could be sent to the four communities for discussion.

Over the following three months the Committee of elected representatives from each of the four communities gathered relevant information on the four communities, monasteries and economies. Two external studies were also commissioned – one on the current and projected age profile and health care needs of the monks of the four houses and also a structural survey of the buildings of the four monasteries. There were regular conference call meetings of the Committee and College and at the beginning of March the group met to study the material collected.

At that time there were 52 monks in the 4 communities, of whom 12 were absent from their monasteries for one reason or another. Of the 52 monks, 1/3 (17) were 86 or older and 1/3 were 71 or younger. Over 20 of the monks are elderly and/or in need of care. Given the age profile of the present members, and the number of monks and skillset required to constitute two distinct communities, the proposal of the group is that we work towards the creation of a single community.

There was a second meeting of the communities on 6 April 2016 and twenty-nine members from the four monasteries gathered, together with the members of the College and with Mother Josephine Mary as facilitator. After the two presentations from external consultants on the current situation of the communities and the monasteries, and a time for discussion and clarification, we broke into three smaller groups, arranged by age, to explore the question “What is the way forward in the light of present realities?” There were different but productive discussions in each group.

A ‘straw vote’ on the proposal to form one community and move to one location was then taken. All the members of the four communities who were present at the meeting had a vote. There were 29 voters. This straw vote was simply to ‘gauge the mind’ of the assembly. 23 voted in favour of the proposal, 6 voted against it:

Mount Melleray	YES 6	NO 2
Mount St Joseph	YES 9	NO 1
Mellifont	YES 6	NO 0
Bethlehem	YES 2	NO 3

The Conventual Chapter vote was taken in each of the four communities on Tuesday 10 May 2016. Only solemnly professed monks with stability in the community could vote and a monk had to be present in the monastery at the time of the vote. Votes by proxy or by post were not permitted.

Text of the vote was as follows:

I desire to see my community join such other monks' communities of the Irish OCSO that decide to come together in a single community, at one location, to consolidate resources in fraternal unity and to work for the re-flourishing of Cistercian life in Ireland.

YES	NO
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Ballot papers with the text of the vote were sent to each community by the secretary of the Generalate in Rome. A 2/3 majority was required in order for the vote to be carried.

The results were as follows:

Mount Melleray	YES 8	NO 7	<i>more than half but not two thirds of the votes</i>	REJECTED
Mount St Joseph	YES 11	NO 1	<i>more than two thirds of the votes</i>	ACCEPTED
Mellifont	YES 6	NO 1	<i>more than two thirds of the votes</i>	ACCEPTED
Bethlehem	YES 2	NO 9	<i>less than half of the votes</i>	REJECTED

These results show a very clear expression of desire concerning the future in three communities while a fourth community is almost evenly divided.

The communities of Mount St Joseph and Mellifont have expressed almost unanimously that they desire to join with other communities to form a single community at one location.

The community of Bethlehem has also made a firm declaration that they do not wish to join with other communities, and by implication to no longer be part of the process initiated by the General Chapter of 2014.

The result of the vote in the community of Mount Melleray is less clear. While less than two thirds of the community voted in favour of the proposal to join with other communities, more than half of the community did. However, as the vote required a two thirds majority in order to be accepted, this community will no longer be part of the process initiated by the General Chapter of 2014 either.

As was stated in the letter of 21 April 2016 from the College to the communities, “those communities who vote in favour of the proposal will pursue a canonical process towards becoming a single Chapter. It will be for the members of this new chapter to determine the location of the new entity, its structure and orientation”. This will be the next stage for the communities of Mount St Joseph and Mellifont.

## VI - DIEPENVEEN

**Report for the Central Commission dated May 25 2016 on Abbey of Sion, Diepenveen/ Schiermonnikoog by Brother Alberic Brusckhe oco, Abbot of Abbey Sion.**

### GENERAL

In the past three years, there have been group meetings at least once a month discussing our situation. These are led by an external facilitator. There have also been frequent meetings with agent Peter Thissen. Furthermore, a project group on the isle of Schiermonnikoog, comprised of the municipality, the county and *Natuurmonumenten* (Dutch Society for Nature Conservation) has also met frequently. The project group is tasked with finding a location for us and looking into further requirements for our establishment there. D. Nathanaël has visited us several times and, in turn, one or more brothers visited Schiermonnikoog in 2014 and 2015.

### LOGBOOK

October 2014: The community had a difficult time, because the votes cast by the General Chapter left us in a very uncertain situation.

April 2015: During an intense session at the Regional Meeting with D. Timothy and M. Regina present, our situation was discussed and clarified.

May 2015, Pentecost: this was the last Eucharist with people from outside. The contract of sale was signed for the house in Langestreek 9 marking the start of our sojourn until the new monastery is ready.

July 2015: The Conventual Chapter held two secret ballots:

1. permission to sell the Abbey and grounds, and
2. agreement to move to a specified location on Schiermonnikoog.

October 2015: A start was made on the inventory of the abbey's movable property.

November 2015: A visit by D. Nathaniel, during which three brothers, Romero, Aloysius and Columba, accepted his invitation to go to Westmalle until the new monastery on Schiermonnikoog is ready. Successive departures of bothers Romero (Nov), Aloysius and Columba (Dec) to Westmalle.

December 2015: The library and other movable property were relocated to Westmalle. The abbey was sold. All the brothers celebrated Christmas in Westmalle. Brother Augustine, who continues to live in the care home in Oosterbeek, was visited as much as possible. Broadcast of a 70-minute documentary about our community. The four remaining brothers left Diepenveen on 29 December to live on Schiermonnikoog.

January-May 2016: The new owner of the abbey would not allow our hermit David to stay, so finally brother David also left for Westmalle (Jan). Permit of the Congregation of selling the Abbey. The brothers on Schiermonnikoog introduced themselves to the public and visited schools, so reaching more than 300 of approximately 900 inhabitants. Huib Ribbens was chosen as the architect for the new monastery. D. Nathanael visited Schiermonnikoog. All the brothers celebrated Easter in Westmalle.

On 22 Feb 2016, B & W Schiermonnikoog launched a nationwide press release, which read as follows: *Firstly, we want to welcome you and your brothers as residents of Schiermonnikoog. We have great regard for the far-reaching decision you have made to leave your monastery in Diepenveen and work on a new start on our island in the coming years. As can be inferred from the name of our town and the logo in our letterhead, your establishment in Schiermonnikoog is of great significance to our community. On 29 January, our College of Mayor and Aldermen met with your community. We met at your monastery in Langestreek. In the same week, you introduced yourselves to the people of Schiermonnikoog at various locations in the village. We experienced these meetings as pleasant and valuable. Like you, the official project group found the conversations with your fiduciaries Mr Loeffen and Thissen constructive and open. We understand that Westerburenweg, your preferred location, is the most suitable place. We believe that a monastery could be built there and would certainly offer our fullest cooperation, however, we note that in the end it is the city council of Schiermonnikoog who must decide whether a monastery in the form proposed by you can be built on this spot. Both the Spatial Development Committee and the inhabitants of the island would need to be consulted before the city council could reach a decision on this question. Erecting a building on the outskirts of the village on virgin land may be considered quite drastic. Experience teaches us that the democratic processes around planning projects like these are unpredictable. Nevertheless, given the professional and careful way in which you and your fiduciaries have operated thus far, we are confident that your project has a good chance of succeeding. We look forward to further cooperation in the coming years and hope that the resettlement of monks to Schiermonnikoog, after more than 400 years of absence, will be successful. Sincerely, Mayor and Aldermen of Schiermonnikoog.*

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