

## CENTRAL COMMISSION 2004

### Introduction

The Abbot General opened the meeting: “With joy we begin this work of the Central Commissions, a collaborative work. We hope that the little cloud in the text about the prophet Elijah, which we read this morning at Mass, will bring us, as was said in the homily, a shower of vocations and of conversion. With this hope, we open the meeting.”

### Procedure

M. Danièle gave a reminder about the nature of the work of the Central Commissions:

- to co-ordinate the suggestions of the regional conferences;
- to establish the agenda of the Mixed General Meeting of 2005 (MGM);
- to decide how the points on the agenda will be prepared before the MGM and to assign them a suitable procedure for treatment at the MGM;

**[Simplified** procedure: points are immediately put to the vote without preliminary study in the Commissions and without debate in the plenary assembly. In this case, an in-depth study of the question in writing must be submitted to the capitulants before the opening of the Chapter, with the exact formulation of the vote that will be taken.

**Ordinary** procedure: the question is studied by four Commissions.

**Extraordinary** procedure: the question is studied by all the Commissions.]

- to plan the practical organisation of the MGM.

The goal of the discussions is to clarify the points in such a way that their preparation before the MGM and their presentation at the MGM itself will be understood by all. It is not for the Central Commissions to resolve the questions which will be treated at the MGM or at the General Chapters (GC), but to decide whether or not to put them on the agenda of these meetings. The procedure is that which was voted on by the Central Commissions at Orval in 1995.

When the two Central Commissions vote together: 25 voters

For a vote of the Central Commission of abbots: 15 voters

For the Central Commission of abbesses: 13 voters

The Abbot General votes in both Commissions, as does the representative of the Canadian region and of the Region of the Isles, as was indicated at the time of the acceptance of these mixed regions.

According to ST 80.J of our Constitutions, “When in session the Central Commission of Abbots and the Central Commission of Abbesses acts as the plenary council of the Abbot General, who consults it in the cases mentioned in ST 84.1.C.”

## I. PREPARATION OF THE MGM

### 1. House reports

#### 1.1 Drawing up the house reports

All were happy with the basic procedure. A vote was taken accepting the text of the Central Commissions 2001, without prejudice to the amendments subsequently discussed and voted.

**VOTE 1:** FOR DRAWING UP THE HOUSE REPORTS, WE WISH TO KEEP THE PROCEDURE ESTABLISHED FOR THE MGM 2002 (SEE APPENDIX 1 OF THE MINUTES OF THE CENTRAL COMMISSIONS 2001, P. 40).

YES 24 NO 0 ABS 1

**Proposition accepted**

The USA region asked that an addition be made to the basic text indicating that a community is always free to use its Visitation Card as the basis for its house report.

**VOTE 2:** WE WISH TO ADD TO THIS PROCEDURE: A COMMUNITY IS ALWAYS FREE TO USE ITS VISITATION CARD AS THE BASIS FOR ITS HOUSE REPORT.

YES 21 NO 2 ABS 2

**Proposition accepted**

### 1.2 Study in the mixed commissions

#### 1.2.1 Presidents of the mixed commissions

- Three regions proposed that the President of a mixed commission should not at the same time be a member of an *ad hoc* commission (i.e. an *ad hoc* commission of the mixed commission itself, not an *ad hoc* commission of the MGM). At the MGM 2002, the work of the mixed commissions was adversely affected when the President was absent in order to attend *ad hoc* commission meetings.
- Some felt that the President of a mixed commission should be a member of an *ad hoc* commission to act as a link between the *ad hoc* commission, the mixed commission, the Coordinating Commission, the Abbot General, and the general assembly. Others felt that this over-values the president and does not respect the competence and collegial responsibility of the other members of the mixed commission.
- It would also be helpful if *ad hoc* commissions could work at some other time than when the mixed commissions are meeting.
- At the beginning of the MGM 2002, the role of the President of the mixed commissions was clearly described; perhaps we need to re-emphasise it. The President is the moderator of a group; it is different from the role of the President of the former Pastoral Commission, who played a very strong part in finding solutions for problems.
- When electing a President, a mixed commission should keep in mind whether this person will be called on to attend a lot of other meetings, e.g. if he is the Father Immediate of a large filiation.
- Commissions could have a vice-president who would replace the president when necessary.

**VOTE 3:** WE WISH THAT EACH MIXED COMMISSION WOULD ALSO ELECT A VICE-PRESIDENT.

YES 24 NO 0 ABS 1

**Proposition accepted**

### 1.2.2 Reading the reports in the commissions

- The USA region recommended that changes to the procedure for the reading of the house reports be in the direction of greater simplification.
- It was felt that what is really required is greater clarity and precision about certain issues, to assist the mixed commissions in their pastoral function. The other discussions and votes on this topic try to achieve that clarity and precision.

### 1.2.3 Consultation of the Father Immediate

Several regions made suggestions about consulting the Father Immediate, by one means or another, when the report of his daughter house is being read. There were cases at the last MGM of problems not mentioned in the house report which came to light only through chance conversation with the Father Immediate.

Four possible options emerged:

- the present text could be retained, i.e. the Father Immediate (and/or other relevant members of the MGM) is consulted by the mixed commission if more information is needed;
- the mixed commission could be obliged to ask the Father Immediate if he wishes to be present at the reading of the report of his daughter house;
- the mixed commission could be obliged to consult the Father Immediate in all cases (without his necessarily being present at the discussions);
- the initiative could be left with the Father Immediate to contact the mixed commission which is studying the report of his daughter house.

Points from the discussion:

- We should try to avoid a situation where a Father Immediate with several daughter houses is constantly absent from his mixed commission because he is obliged to be present when the reports of his daughter houses are being read.
- The house reports are to be drawn up in consultation with the Father Immediate; therefore he already knows if a report is accurate or not. If he knows of problems in his daughter house, he should be valiant in coming forward to speak to the mixed commission about them.
- Sometimes there is tension between a community and its Father Immediate. In this case, a mixed commission of people from outside can sometimes help the situation.
- Leaving the initiative with the Father Immediate would relieve the burden of the mixed commission.
- Could we have a text which leaves the initiative with *both* the mixed commission *and* the Father Immediate? So that he could approach the mixed commission, or they could approach him?

**VOTE 4:** WE WISH THAT THE PRESIDENT OF THE MIXED COMMISSION ASK THE FATHER IMMEDIATE IF HE WISHES TO BE PRESENT AT THE DISCUSSION OF THE REPORT OF HIS DAUGHTER HOUSE.

YES 0 NO 18 ABS 5 Proposition rejected

**VOTE 5:** WE WISH THAT THE FATHER IMMEDIATE BE CONSULTED WHEN THE REPORT OF HIS DAUGHTER HOUSE IS BEING DISCUSSED.

*(Note: this consultation can be done in different ways, and does not necessarily imply that that Father Immediate participate in the discussions.)*

YES 19 NO 3 ABS 3 **Proposition accepted**

**VOTE 6:** WE WISH TO ADD A PHRASE TO § 2.1 OF THE DOCUMENT: *THE FATHER IMMEDIATE HAS THE RIGHT TO PROVIDE PERTINENT INFORMATION TO THE PRESIDENT OF THE MIXED COMMISSION THAT IS READING THE REPORT OF HIS DAUGHTER HOUSE.*

YES 22 NO 0 ABS 3 **Proposition accepted**

### 1.2.4 Authority of the mixed commissions

What authority do mixed commissions have? Can they make decisions with regard to a community, or only suggestions? Some think that it is clear according to the existing text that a mixed commission can only make suggestions, while decisions have to be made by the plenary assembly. Others think that the mixed commissions already have decisive pastoral authority, by virtue of their being created by the MGM. If they do not have it, they are wasting time.

- In some cases, communities did not accept the recommendations of the mixed commissions; they received them, not as decisions, but as proposals which they were free to consider and accept or not.
- The right of an abbot/abbess or of a community not to accept the recommendation of a mixed commission does not mean that the mixed commission did not have the right to make it in the first place.
- If we accept that the mixed commissions have, by delegation, the authority of the General Chapters, then there is no need for a mixed commission to ask the plenary session of the General Chapters to approve its decisions, except in the cases mentioned in C.79 (rights reserved to the General Chapters).
- If a mixed commission creates an *ad hoc* commission, the *ad hoc* commission should refer its findings back to the mixed commission in the first instance.

**VOTE 7:** BEFORE BEING PRESENTED TO THE PARTIES CONCERNED, THE SUGGESTIONS MADE BY A MIXED COMMISSION SHOULD BE ACCEPTED BY A MAJORITY VOTE OF ITS MEMBERS.

YES 25 unanimous

**Proposition accepted**

**VOTE 8:** WE WISH THAT THE MIXED COMMISSIONS HAVE, BY DELEGATION, THE AUTHORITY OF THE GENERAL CHAPTERS, WHEN THEY STUDY THE HOUSE REPORTS, IN ORDER TO SUGGEST OR DECIDE WHAT SHOULD BE DONE PASTORALLY, AND TO REQUIRE THE PUTTING INTO EFFECT OF THEIR DECISIONS, EXCEPT WHEN THERE IS QUESTION OF RIGHTS RESERVED TO THE GENERAL CHAPTERS (CF. C. 79).

YES 17 NO 5 ABS 2

**Proposition accepted**

### 1.2.5 Recourse and follow-up

RIM asked for clarification about the occasions of recourse where decisions taken by the mixed commissions were not applied by the concerned parties.

- Recourse is not an appeal; recourse means going to a higher authority, asking for another look at the situation. 'Appeal' means asking for the annulment of a decision that has been taken.
- If we agree that the mixed commissions have the authority of the General Chapters, someone cannot have recourse to the General Chapter about a decision of a mixed commission, since it is not a higher authority. However, it seems necessary to give to the parties affected by the decision the possibility of bringing the issue back to the plenary assembly, so that it can decide the procedure to be followed.

The text provides for cases where follow-up is necessary. But who is responsible for putting the decisions of a mixed commission into effect after the Chapter? There cannot be proper follow-up if the channels of authority are not clear.

- In the case of a decision which has to be put into practice during the Chapter, it is the mixed commission which is responsible for seeing that it is carried out. If something has to be followed up after the Chapter, it is the responsibility of the Father Immediate to see that it is done (unless clearly stated otherwise). If he fails to do this, the Abbot General – who receives all the documents of the mixed commissions – can intervene in the name of the Chapter.
- Perhaps we should put this into the text?
- At the MGM 2002, there were about 160 house reports; many complex situations were dealt with in a short space of time, and were well handled. 25 cases required special follow-up. Of these, there were problems afterwards in only 3 cases, and 2 of those were quickly solved. Considering all the other work of the Chapter, it is extraordinary what got done.

**VOTE 9:** IF NOT IN AGREEMENT WITH THE DECISION OF A MIXED COMMISSION, THOSE CONCERNED MAY HAVE RECOURSE TO THE PLENARY ASSEMBLY, WHICH WILL DECIDE THE PROCEDURE TO BE FOLLOWED.

YES 24 NO 0 ABS 0

**Proposition accepted**

### 1.2.6 Plenary assembly

Two regions (FSO, Remila), asked that that a report be regularly made to the Coordinating Commission which would indicate the progress of the work on the house reports. At the last MGM, at first nobody knew what was happening. There was a special meeting one night to find out the status quo of the work. This information should be passed on more regularly.

**VOTE 10:** WE WISH THE SECRETARIES OF THE MIXED COMMISSIONS TO REPORT REGULARLY TO THE COORDINATING COMMISSION, GIVING A PROGRESS REPORT ON THEIR WORK ON THE HOUSE REPORTS.

YES 22 NO 0 ABS 3

**Proposition accepted**

Two other regions (Isles, USA) asked that a new structure be established to assure the circulation of necessary information from the mixed commissions to the Coordinating Commission and the Abbot General.

Points from the discussion:

- Section 2.3 of the procedure says that in situations which need more pastoral care, “the mixed commission will draw up a report and inform the Coordinating Commission and the Abbot General”. At MGM 2002, this became a burden for the Abbot General. The Coordinating Commission saw its role only as scheduling time to deal with the matters, it was not available to assist the Abbot General at the pastoral level.
- Some felt that we should establish a new structure which would be responsible for help in this area, and for assuring the circulation of information amongst the relevant parties.
- Others thought that the secretaries of the mixed commissions would be the best person to make this report.
- In the last MGM, very little information from the mixed commissions was given to the plenary assembly. Things were learned after the Chapter which should have been communicated while it was in session. When we had the old Pastoral Commission, there was a moment in the Chapter when its President gave an account in plenary assembly of the cases which it had treated. Confidentiality was respected, as well as the solidarity of the Chapter.
- When decisions have to be made by the MGM, it is essential that the capitulants have all the relevant information. Collegially the MGM has responsibility for the

decisions made, so the capitulants have the right and the duty to know why those decisions were made.

- The Coordinating Commission needs clear criteria to know what points should be brought to the attention of the plenary assembly.

**VOTE 11:** WE WISH TO ESTABLISH A COMMISSION OF THREE MEMBERS TO COORDINATE THE TRANSMISSION OF INFORMATION BETWEEN THE MIXED COMMISSIONS, THE ABBOT GENERAL, THE COORDINATING COMMISSION AND, IF NECESSARY, THE PLENARY ASSEMBLY.

YES 24 NO 0 ABS 1 **Proposition accepted**

**VOTE 12:** THIS COMMISSION WILL BE APPOINTED BY THE CENTRAL COMMISSIONS.

YES 14 NO 8 ABS 3 **Proposition accepted**

Following this vote, nominations were made for this commission:

Dom Jacques of Mistassini  
 Dom Carlos of Sobrado  
 Dom Bede of Calvaire  
 Dom Timothy, Procurator General  
 M. Maria of Hinojo  
 M. Marie of Glencairn  
 M. Josepha of Sujong  
 M. Gail of Mississipii  
 M. Florença of Huambo

**VOTE:** Dom Carlos, Dom Timothy, and M. Gail were elected.

### 1.3 Vision of the Order

According to the document *Study of the House Reports at the MGM*, “after all the general reports of the mixed commissions are heard, with some time after each report for clarifications, the reports will be confided to someone or to an *ad hoc* commission, so that a global vision (state of the Order) can be formulated based on these reports. Any issues or trends that would be of interest or concern to the MGM will be highlighted.”

The document that came into existence at the MGM 2002 was not just a synthesis, but an exhortation to the communities. It was more charismatic than was foreseen by the procedures. CNE region hoped that the next Chapters would produce a new document along the same lines, giving more precise orientations for the lives of the communities.

- Most were very positive about the 2002 ‘Vision of the Order’ statement. It brought the work of the Chapters back to the communities and the regions, so that the work of the MGM did not finish when the MGM itself finished, but continued and developed afterwards. We should try to maintain this, to bring the dynamic of the MGM to the communities and the regions.
- But for some, asking for a “vision of the Order” is too ambitious. It would be better to ask for a synthesis of the house reports; if something more charismatic emerges, that is fine, but we should not demand it.

- At the last MGM we produced a charismatic document without having planned or legislated for it. The same could happen again.
- In 2002, the word “global” was dropped from the title of the document when it was discussed in the MGM. Perhaps we should drop it permanently.

**VOTE 13:** IN §3 OF THE DOCUMENT *STUDY OF THE HOUSE REPORTS AT THE MGM* WE WISH TO SUPPRESS THE EXPRESSION *GLOBAL VISION OF THE ORDER* AND TO REPLACE IT BY *SITUATION OF THE ORDER*.

YES 25 (unanimous)

**Proposition accepted**

**VOTE 14:** IN §3.2, AFTER THE SENTENCE WHICH ENDS: “... CONCERN TO THE MGM WILL BE HIGHLIGHTED” WE WISH TO ADD THE FOLLOWING SENTENCE: *THE MGM WILL ALSO INVITE THE REGIONS AND COMMUNITIES TO CONTINUE REFLECTION ON THESE ISSUES OR TRENDS.*

YES 21 NO 1 ABS 3

**Proposition accepted**

**VOTE 15:** WE WISH THE MGM TO PRODUCE A NEW *GLOBAL VISION OF THE ORDER*, IN THE SPIRIT OF THE PREVIOUS ONE, AND TO GIVE PRECISE ORIENTATIONS FOR THE LIFE OF THE COMMUNITIES.

YES 3 NO 13 ABS 9

Proposition rejected

See **Annexe I** for the new text of “*The House Reports and their Treatment at the MGM*”, as it stands following votes 1 to 15.

*This text will be presented to the vote of the capitulants at the beginning of the MGM 2005.*

## 2. Points to be put on the agenda of the MGM

### 2.1 Structures of the Order

#### 2.1.1 A single Chapter

The MGM 2002 voted that we are open to the possibility of the Order moving towards a mixed General Chapter. It asked the Law Commission to prepare a study showing the possible options and the consequences of a mixed General Chapter; this was done and has been studied by the regional conferences in preparation for this Central Commissions meeting.

All the regions wish to move towards a single General Chapter, but some are more cautious than others. Some have reservations about whether gender differences will really be respected. Remila would like more clarity about the consequences in our Constitutions. They feel that the subject needs more detailed study and reflection by the whole Order, and that we are not ready to reach a definite decision at MGM 2005; they would like the topic to be dealt with by the extraordinary procedure.

Others feel that there is enough clarity and that enough structures are in place to begin the process; they would hope to reach a definite decision on this at the MGM 2005, and think that it could be dealt with by the ordinary procedure.

**VOTE 16:** WE WISH THAT THE QUESTION OF A SINGLE CHAPTER BE PLACED ON THE PROGRAMME OF THE MGM OF 2005.

YES 25 (unanimous)

**Proposition accepted**

**VOTE 17:** WE WISH THAT THIS QUESTION BE TREATED BY THE EXTRAORDINARY PROCEDURE.

YES 23 NO 1 ABS 1 **Proposition accepted**

**VOTE 18:** WE WISH TO HAVE A WORKING PAPER, WHICH WOULD SHOW THE CONSEQUENCES IN OUR CONSTITUTIONS OF THE SUGGESTIONS MADE BY THE REGIONAL CONFERENCES CONCERNING A SINGLE CHAPTER.

YES 25 (unanimous) **Proposition accepted**

**VOTE 19:** THE LAW COMMISSION WILL WRITE THIS DOCUMENT.

YES 21 NO 0 ABS 4 **Proposition accepted**

### 2.1.2 Fathers Immediate

#### (a) Vade Mecum

The CNE region requested that a *vade mecum* be edited on the role of the Father Immediate and his relations with the structures of the Order. Sometimes the role and function of the Father Immediate is not clear, or the legislation is not well adapted. It might be helpful in concrete situations to have a *vade mecum*.

- A *vade mecum* gathers together all the points of the law, and presents them in a convenient form for the superiors' use. Some felt that there is not very much law concerning Fathers Immediate, and that what is needed is something more at the level of pastoral care.
- Nevertheless others felt that there is a certain amount of legislation set out in various different documents. It might be good to bring it all together in one place, for clarity, so that each one would know what is laid down by the law, and not just see things from his own perspective.
- The Central Commissions can ask the Law Commission to draw up this *vade mecum*; it does not have to go to the MGM for approval.

**VOTE 20:** WE WISH THE LAW COMMISSION TO WRITE A VADE MECUM ON THE ROLE OF THE FATHER IMMEDIATE AND HIS RELATIONS WITH THE STRUCTURES OF THE ORDER.

YES 24 NO 0 ABS 1 **Proposition accepted**

#### (b) Reviewing the pastoral care of the Father Immediate

The USA region requested the Central Commissions to consider the possibility of having a regular procedure for reviewing the Father Immediate's pastoral care of his daughter houses. Experience at the General Chapters shows that there are sometimes evident tensions between communities and their Fathers Immediate. If there was a time and place for evaluation of the relationship, perhaps something could be done earlier, before the situation becomes explosive; some opportunity for the superior of a daughter-house to express how s/he experiences the pastoral care of the Father Immediate.

- There are different relationships between Fathers Immediate and their filiations. It varies significantly. Expectations can be very different. There can also be inter-cultural and other problems. It might be good to have a process for looking at them.
- Opportunities already exist for dealing with these problems: a community can respond to a regular visitation, in writing to the Abbot General; the pastoral care of the Father Immediate can be examined at a Visitation carried out by another Visitor; there are opportunities at regional meetings, and at the MGM. What is being asked for is a new structure to make this a regular procedure.
- But the percentage of communities in the Order which have ongoing problems with their Fathers Immediate is very small. We might only create difficulties



where they do not exist; that is a danger when we set up too many structures and procedures.

- If a Father Immediate received some negative feedback from e.g. members of another regional conference, about his pastoral activity, how would he take it? - Hopefully, he would take it well, as an effort to help him in his pastoral service.
- It seemed that the *vade mecum* would respond to this need. The Father Immediate would be more clear about his responsibility, and the community too, so there would not be unrealistic expectations of him. This might mean fewer conflicts.

### **(c) Fathers Immediate with large filiations**

The NED region asked that the concern about Fathers Immediate with large filiations be brought to the attention of the General Chapters. This issue arose at the last MGM, from concrete cases. When an abbot has to devote much of his time and attention to daughter-houses, his own community can suffer, and also his health. In the past, filiations have been re-defined so that individuals are not overburdened. Is it time to look at this again?

- One member of the Central Commissions who is the Father Immediate of a large filiation said it would be useful to put this on the agenda of the MGM. He has seven daughter-houses on four continents. He has tentatively raised the subject of re-distribution with some of his daughter-houses, but did not get a favourable response. The ones most resistant to the idea are those which engage him most. It would be helpful to have this issue discussed at the level of the Order, so that communities would see that it is not a matter of “getting rid” of them or “dropping” them, but of facing up to the reality of our precariousness. Furthermore, a Father Immediate himself may be able for the burden, but his community may not. His frequent absences can have a negative effect his own community, and slow down community processes.
- When the filiations were re-distributed in the past, some of the changes worked well, others did not. Some communities were upset. It is not easy to be told that you are going to be dropped from a filiation. It would be good if the community and the Father Immediate could dialogue first, so that they can see the possibilities of helping him in his pastoral duties.
- The problems of a Father Immediate are not always related to the number of daughter-houses. Some already feel overwhelmed by their home situation. Others who have large filiations can manage well. The answer does not necessarily lie in having fewer daughter houses, redistributed according to objective criteria, but in dealing with problematic situations on a case-by-case basis.
- Two suggestions were made: to have a panel on this topic at the MGM, as a way of sensitising people to the question; and to do a survey amongst all Fathers Immediate, the results to be presented at the MGM.
- A plea was made that European and American Fathers Immediate with daughter houses in Africa would give them special consideration. There are many problems which militate against African superiors taking on the responsibility of Father Immediate, especially the difficulties of travel within Africa, communications problems, and economic issues.

The question arises: if we put this item on the agenda of the MGM, would it include a consideration of nuns' houses taking responsibility for their own foundations? Since we are moving towards greater equality and co-responsibility in many areas, would it

not make sense to have Mothers Immediate? There seems to be some hesitation on the part of the nuns about moving in this direction – why?

- Traditionally, the nuns have felt part of the Order through their link with the Father Immediate. Some have a real fear of losing that relationship. Things have changed now, and the Father Immediate is not needed for that link. But for those nuns who do not have much experience of the two branches working together, there is a real loss involved; it is emotional and affective, but real, and will take time to work through. There is also the fear of no longer having chaplains from communities of monks. And we would lose the enrichment in having different points of view, the interchange between men and women.
- Furthermore, nuns seem to tolerate the absence of their abbess much less than monks tolerate that of the abbot. An evolution would have to take place if the abbess were to be absent from the community much more frequently. However, the next generation of nuns will probably not have a problem with this.
- Of course there would be some advantages in having Mothers Immediate: it would be another step on the road to equality, and it would challenge the ability of the abbesses.
- But if we do not want to create parallel organisations, we should think in terms of crossed filiations, the possibility of sometimes having Mothers Immediate of male monasteries and Fathers Immediate for nuns.
- Perhaps Mothers Immediate could be introduced without having to be an absolute feature or obligatory for all houses? For example, not for old houses whose founding house no longer exists, or for those with large filiations.
- The subject of Mothers Immediate is often talked about, but not openly. It would be good to study this sometime and talk about it together. But wanting to help Fathers Immediate is not a sufficient reason to create Mothers Immediate.

**VOTE 21:** WE WISH THE SITUATION OF FATHERS IMMEDIATE WITH MANY FILIATIONS TO GET THE PASTORAL ATTENTION OF THE GENERAL CHAPTERS.

YES 4 NO 2 ABS 19 **Proposition accepted**

**VOTE 22:** WE WISH TO HAVE A PANEL AT THE MGM WITH FATHERS IMMEDIATE WHO HAVE MANY FILIATIONS.

YES 8 NO 15 ABS 2 Proposition rejected

**VOTE 23:** WE WISH THAN AN ENQUIRY BE MADE AMONG ABBOTS AND COMMUNITIES WITH MANY FILIATIONS.

YES 14 NO 4 ABS 7 **Proposition accepted**

**VOTE 24:** WE LEAVE IT TO THE ABBOT GENERAL TO ORGANISE THE ENQUIRY AMONG THE ABBOTS AND COMMUNITIES WITH MANY FILIATIONS.

YES 22 NO 0 ABS 0 **Proposition accepted**

### 2.1.3 Composition of the Central Commissions

The CNE region expressed three desires in this matter:

1. That a study be made of the composition of the Central Commissions with a view to the possibility of dissociating representation from the regions.

2. That there be an evaluation of the criteria of representation and of the efficiency of the Central Commissions.
3. That the method of representation of the regions be studied in the context of their reorganisation.

The Canadian region wishes the continuation of representation by regions.

- From the beginning we insisted that the members of the Central Commissions should be elected by the Chapters following proposal by the regions. It is good that in the Central Commissions there should be a certain representation of the different cultures and sensitivities in the Order, but this not necessarily linked to the regions.
- The number of regions could be increased for the sake of better pastoral work, but the number of members of the Central Commissions should not become so big that it cannot work well.
- It is certainly the right time to see how the Central Commissions fits with the other structures of the Order. We have revised the Statute on the Regular Visitation, we are in the process of modifying the General Chapters, and of restructuring certain regions; it is important to do a study of the Central Commissions to see what direction to follow.
- The Central Commissions have a very precise role, that of preparing the General Chapters; but in the choice of members of the Central Commissions, efficiency should not be the only criterion, or we risk having the same people all the time, those who are most efficient. However, we could simplify things, for example we could think of having just one representative per region, either a monk or a nun.
- Some thought it important to put this point on the agenda, but CNE asked only that a study be done to open up reflection at the level of the regions and the communities.

**VOTE 25:** WE WISH TO PUT ON THE PROGRAMME OF THE MGM THE QUESTION OF THE POSSIBILITY OF A NEW COMPOSITION OF THE CENTRAL COMMISSIONS, WITH THE POSSIBILITY OF DISSOCIATING THE REPRESENTATION FROM THE REGIONS.

YES 6 NO 9 ABS 9 Proposition rejected

**VOTE 26:** WE WISH THAT A STUDY BE DONE WITH A VIEW TO RETHINKING THE COMPOSITION OF THE CENTRAL COMMISSIONS, WITH THE POSSIBILITY OF DISSOCIATING THEM FROM REPRESENTATION BY REGIONS AND PRESENTING AND JUSTIFYING THE DIFFERENT OPTIONS POSSIBLE, IN THE PERSPECTIVE OF THE PROPOSALS OF CNE.

YES 20 NO 1 ABS 4 **Proposition accepted**

**VOTE 27:** THIS STUDY WILL BE CONFIDED TO:

- A COMMISSION OF 3 PERSONS YES 21 **Proposition accepted**  
[- one person Yes 4]

**VOTE 28:** THE 3 MEMBERS OF THE COMMISSION RESPONSIBLE FOR THE STUDY ON *THE COMPOSITION OF THE CENTRAL COMMISSIONS* WILL BE MEMBERS OF THE CNE REGION AND CHOSEN BY IT.

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

### 2.1.4 Commissions of Aid for the Future

Several regions made suggestions about these Commissions, in particular asking that some information be given or experiences shared at the MGM about the manner of naming such commissions, their mandate, how they function, their duration, etc.

The Abbot General began by giving some information about the eight Commissions which exist at the moment, recalling that the first experience was in 1990.

- The establishment of norms would be useful for the smooth running of these Commissions, so that people know who does what. That is the meaning of the proposal of FSO, who summed up the norms which the Abbot General and his Council established at the request of one of these Commissions. But the Commissions do not need to consent of the Abbot General in order to function; he must simply be informed.
- However, this proposition met with some reservations. There was a fear of a certain rigidity in the functioning of a body which should be able to adapt to each particular case. These cases are often very different from one another, and it is preferable to leave them a certain amount of freedom of method. Some communities have Commissions of aid in the area of economic or financial activity, and each one has worked out its own way of functioning according to particular need.
- In fact, what the Abbot General and his Council have given are more orientations than norms.
- But it would seem good to share experiences of how Commissions have come into existence, their composition, their relationship with the Council of the local community, with the community as a whole, with the Father Immediate (is he always a member of the Commission?), etc. This could be the subject of a conference or a panel.

**VOTE 29:** WE WISH THAT A DOCUMENT BE WRITTEN WHICH WOULD SYNTHESISE ALL THE EXPERIENCES OF THE COMMISSIONS OF AID FOR THE FUTURE AND PROPOSE SOME ORIENTATIONS WITH REGARD TO THE SETTING UP OF, THE FUNCTIONING, ETC, OF THESE COMMISSIONS.

YES 21 NO 0 ABS 1

**Proposition accepted**

**VOTE 30:** THIS SYNTHESIS WILL BE WRITTEN BY:

[ - a commission of 3 members yes 0 no 19 abs 1 ]

- THE COUNCIL OF THE ABBOT GENERAL.

YES 19 NO 0 ABS 3

**Proposition accepted**

**VOTE 31:** THIS SYNTHESIS WILL BE PRESENTED AT THE MGM.

YES 20 NO 1 ABS 1

**Proposition accepted**

**VOTE 32:** AT THE MGM WE WISH TO HAVE SOME PEOPLE SHARE THEIR EXPERIENCE OF COMMISSIONS OF AID FOR THE FUTURE.

YES 14 NO 3 ABS 5

**Proposition accepted**

### 2.1.5 Integration of the Structures of the Order

The CNE region suggested that we should clarify the interaction between the traditional structures of the Order (General Chapters, filiations, Regular Visitations) and the more recent structures (Central Commissions, regions, Commissions of Aid for the Future).

- The Constitutions define the functions of all the traditional structures. For the more recent structures (those of the last 35 years or so), the Central Commissions have the *Procedures*, and the Constitutions explain their goal. There is great variety among the regions, but almost all of them have a Statute which determines their goal, composition, mode of functioning, and possible sub-groups. But it is difficult to be familiar with all these proper statutes. Similarly, the

pastoral work done by the regions is not always well-integrated with the task of the Father Immediate, which can lead to conflicts, because a Father Immediate may not be able to participate in meetings of other regions where a house of his filiation is discussed. As regards Commissions of Aid for the Future, we have only just begun. Up to now they have respected the authority of the Father Immediate because he has been a member of the Commission. Can the Abbot General be considered as a “structure”? Certainly, as can the person of the Father Immediate. These are structures of the personal type, which need to be integrated with the General Chapters, the Regular Visitations, the Central Commissions, regional meetings, Commissions of Aid, etc. The Abbot General’s Council ought also to be integrated with all these structures, people, and services. We do not yet have an overall, integrated vision of all this, especially in what concerns the regions and the Commissions of Aid. But it does seem premature to take decisions for these latter. Perhaps the most important thing is to study the regions and the integration of their pastoral work with that of the Abbot General and of the Father Immediate.

- Sometimes superiors do not know how to make use of all these structures, and that may be a source of tension in a region and in the Order. In particular, new superiors are not familiar with these structures and with the law, and do not know to whom they should refer.
- In some regions, the creation of sub-regions helps pastoral work at this level. But these small groups risk becoming disconnected from the problems of the Order.
- It seems premature to study this topic at the next MGM, but drawing up a document on the integration of the different structures within the Order would stimulate reflection in the communities and in the regions.

**VOTE 33:** WE WISH A DOCUMENT TO BE WRITTEN WHICH WOULD SHOW THE INTERACTION BETWEEN THE DIFFERENT STRUCTURES WITHIN THE ORDER.

YES	22	NO	0	ABS	3	<b>Proposition accepted</b>
-----	----	----	---	-----	---	-----------------------------

**VOTE 34:** THIS DOCUMENT WILL BE WRITTEN BY:

[- one person Yes 7 No 8 Abs 9]

- THE LAW COMMISSION

YES	23	NO	0	ABS	2	<b>Proposition accepted</b>
-----	----	----	---	-----	---	-----------------------------

**VOTE 35:** WE WISH THIS DOCUMENT TO BE DISTRIBUTED AT THE MGM.

YES	23	NO	0	ABS	2	<b>Proposition accepted</b>
-----	----	----	---	-----	---	-----------------------------

## 2.2 Points of legislation

### 2.2.1 Separation from the world

The task here was to decide how the matter will be dealt with at the MGM. In accordance with Votes 115 and 116 of the MGM 2002, the Law Commission drew up a provisional common text (C.29) on separation from the world (cf. Law Commission Minutes 2003, pp. 1-4). This text has been studied by the regions, and they have made various suggestions. There is a general acceptance of the text, with some exceptions. The USA region also requested that a working document be prepared which expresses our Cistercian tradition on the cloister, adapted to the thought and terminology of the contemporary world. Other regions (CNE, RE) also thought that we should see the reformulating of C.29 as an opportunity to restate our position in a more positive, dynamic way. The USA region asked that the new text of C.29 not be voted on at the next MGM, to allow time for further development in our thinking.

- Most agreed that a document which would study our understanding of the subject today and try to express it in contemporary terms would be good. But we cannot abandon traditional language entirely. And should the language of one culture / region be imposed on all?
- We also need a commission to establish a new text of C.29 and C.13.3, taking into account what the regions have proposed. Perhaps this text could include different options, so that the Chapters could chose between them.
- Perhaps the text of C.29 could be quite brief, and alongside it we could have a Statute on Separation from the World, which would make more explicit what it is that we are living.
- If we do that, the Statute would have to be seen by the Holy See. The Congregation does not approve Statutes, but if a new text of C.29 has to be approved, it would wish to see the Statue also, and would analyse it critically. We should not try to hide anything, but be honest about our position.
- This is a topic on which our thinking is evolving. At the next Chapters need input from people with prophetic vision, who can share their understanding of separation from the world in a life-giving way. Perhaps a panel or a conference of the Abbot General on this topic would stretch our thinking and help us to live this value as well as to finalise a text.

**VOTE 36:** WE WISH THAT A COMMISSION BE NAMED TO NOTE AND STUDY THE REACTIONS AND SUGGESTIONS OF THE VARIOUS REGIONS TO THE PROPOSED TEXT FOR C 29 AND C 13.3, AND TO DRAW UP A NEW TEXT.

YES 24 NO 1 ABS 0 **Proposition accepted**

**VOTE 37:** THIS NEW TEXT WILL BE PROPOSED TO THE VOTE OF THE MGM 2005.

YES 18 NO 4 ABS 3 **Proposition accepted**

**VOTE 38:** THE NEW TEXT OF C.29 AND C.13.3 WILL BE WRITTEN BY THE LAW COMMISSION.

YES 20 NO 2 ABS 1 **Proposition accepted**

**VOTE 39:** WE WISH THAT A COMMISSION DRAW UP A DOCUMENT ON MONASTIC SOLITUDE ACCORDING TO OUR CISTERCIAN TRADITION, TAKING INTO ACCOUNT CONTEMPORARY THOUGHT AND USING PRESENT-DAY LANGUAGE.

YES 19 NO 1 ABS 5 **Proposition accepted**

**VOTE 40:** THE DOCUMENT ON *MONASTIC SOLITUDE* WILL BE CONFIDED TO A COMMISSION COMPOSED OF MEMBERS OF THE US REGION AND CHOSEN BY IT.

YES 22 NO 1 ABS 1 **Proposition accepted**

### 2.2.2 Statute on the Regular Visitation

Vote 70 of the MGM 2002 asked that “a revised and clearer text for the section on the Visitor, paragraphs 7 through 11, of the *Statute on the Regular Visitation* be drawn up by the Law Commission and submitted to the next General Chapters for their approval.” This text was drawn up by the Law Commission (cf. Law Commission Minutes 2003, pp 3 & 4) and studied by the Regions.

- The Canadian region asks that the right of the Visitor to visit the places be included in the Statute.
- Three regions (Isles, USA, RAFMA), agree with the text proposed by the Law Commission. The USA region asks for clarification about the Assistant Visitor in 9a; and suggests a modification to 10a. RE proposes changing the order of nos. 9 and 10, with some consequent amendments.

- The USA region asked that the Chapter of Abbesses consider modifying its vote concerning the presence of an expert at the Regular Visitation (no. 9b).

**VOTE 41:** WE PROPOSE THAT MENTION BE MADE IN THE STATUTE ON THE REGULAR VISITATION OF THE RIGHT OF THE VISITOR TO VISIT THE PLACES.

YES 15 NO 0 ABS 7 **Proposition accepted**

**VOTE 42:** WE ASK THE LAW COMMISSION TO WRITE A NEW TEXT FOR PARAGRAPHS 7-11 OF THE STATUTE ON THE REGULAR VISITATION IN THE LIGHT OF THE SUGGESTIONS MADE BY THE REGIONS.

YES 22 NO 0 ABS 0 **Proposition accepted**

**VOTE 43:** THIS POINT WILL BE TREATED ACCORDING TO THE SIMPLIFIED PROCEDURE AT THE GENERAL CHAPTERS.

YES 22 NO 0 ABS 0 **Proposition accepted**

*The following votes were taken by the Central Commission of Abbesses*

**VOTE 44:** WE ASK THAT THE CHAPTER OF ABBESSES CONSIDER THE POSSIBLE MODIFICATION OF ITS VOTE CONCERNING THE PRESENCE OF AN EXPERT AT THE REGULAR VISITATION (NO. 9.B).

YES 8 NO 2 ABS 1 **Proposition accepted**

**VOTE 45:** THIS POINT WILL BE TREATED BY:

- the extraordinary procedure:	yes 0	no 10	abs 1]
- the ordinary procedure	yes 0	no 11	abs 1]
THE SIMPLIFIED PROCEDURE	<b>Proposition accepted</b>		

**VOTE 46:** THE WORKING PAPER FOR THE POSSIBLE MODIFICATION OF THE VOTE OF THE CHAPTER OF ABBESSES CONCERNING THE PRESENCE OF AN EXPERT AT THE REGULAR VISITATION IS CONFIDED TO:

- ONE PERSON

YES 3 NO 8 ABS 1 Proposition rejected

The alternative proposal, that the document be written by the **Law Commission**, is therefore accepted without vote.

### 2.2.3 Statute on Foundations

At the MGM 2002, the two General Chapters voted separately on the following text: "The last sentence of no. 14 (*of the Statute on Foundations*) will be as follows: as for solemn professions, they cannot be made as long as the foundation has not attained its autonomy, unless the temporary professed is part of the group of founders. In which case, the abbot/abbess presents him/her to the vote of the conventual chapter of the founding house, after having received the consent of the solemn professed of the foundation who have the right to vote."

The vote was rejected by the General Chapter of Abbots (Yes 36; No 56; Abs 3), but accepted by the General Chapter of Abbesses (Yes 32; No 28; Abs 5), leaving the two branches with different legislation on this point.

Immediately after this vote, there was a request for the opportunity to re-take it, but it was not granted. Two regions (CAN, Aspac/Oriens) now propose that the possibility be offered to the General Chapter of Nuns to re-take this vote. CNE region expresses the desire for one legislation bringing the two branches together on this point; they ask that both Chapters re-visit the question, and that it be studied in the larger context of the conditions required for the autonomy foreseen by the Statute on Foundations. Furthermore, the USA region wishes that when confirming the Acts of

the Chapters of 2002, special attention should be given to those votes in which there is a discrepancy between the votes of the two Chapters.

It seems that in trying to solve one problem (the incongruity of someone making solemn profession for a house that will not be his/hers, and that he/she does not know), we created another one. The new legislation (of the nuns) is drastic; it prohibits the solemn profession of anyone who enters a foundation, until the community attains autonomy. This has serious implications for some communities.

- One suggestion was that we make a study of the concrete cases affected by this vote. It is not just a matter of re-taking a vote, but of reconsidering all aspects of the problem.
- It was felt that perhaps in 2002 many capitulants did not really understand the issues, especially those whose communities do not have foundations. So it would be more prudent to restudy the matter in the Chapters, and not to use simplified procedure.
- One aspect of the problem is the length of time it takes for a foundation to attain its autonomy. Perhaps we should have more courage and allow the establishment of simple priories at an earlier stage.

**VOTE 47:** WE WISH THAT THE PROBLEMS RAISED BY VOTE 107 OF THE GENERAL CHAPTERS OF 2002 (STATUTE ON FOUNDATIONS, NO. 14) BE RESTUDIED AT THE MGM OF 2005 IN THE BROADER CONTEXT OF THE CONDITIONS REQUIRED FOR THE AUTONOMY OF A HOUSE.

YES 15 NO 3 ABS 4 **Proposition accepted**

**VOTE 48:** WE WISH TO HAVE A WORKING PAPER.

YES 22 NO 0 ABS 0 **Proposition accepted**

**VOTE 49:** THIS DOCUMENT WILL BE WRITTEN BY:

[- a commission of 3 members: yes 3 no 16 abs 3]  
- THE LAW COMMISSION.

YES 18 NO 1 ABS 3 **Proposition accepted**

**VOTE 50:** THIS QUESTION WILL BE TREATED BY:

[- the extraordinary procedure: yes 0 no 21 abs 1]  
- THE ORDINARY PROCEDURE.

YES 15 NO 3 ABS 3 **Proposition accepted**

### **2.2.4 Communities in precarious situations**

When speaking about this subject, we need to distinguish between precarity in general and the very concrete precarious situations of certain communities.

As regards communities in a precarious situation, one region asked to continue the reflection, and three others said that they are in favour of the completion of our legislation so that it can respond to the needs of these communities.

RE studied this theme based on the reports of each community of that region and on a sociological study. This work has been sent back to the communities to make them more aware of their situation, because some of them do not want to acknowledge their precarity. This lack of awareness is itself the greatest precarity. The superiors and the communities must work on this.

Remila drew up a document to help the communities of their region to reflect on the theme of precarity in general.



There is a wish to discuss this topic further at the MGM, but it does not seem useful to put it on the agenda because it will surely arise from the study of the house reports.

### **Suppression of a monastery**

The NED region brought up this point, expressing their desire for an inventory of the possibilities and difficulties which have arisen during the suppression of a monastery. They also wish that from this inventory, a working paper be made available to the Order. It is not a matter of criticising what has been done, but of learning positive lessons from the experience.

**VOTE 51:** WE ASK THAT THE TWO COMMISSIONS WHO ASSISTED THE COMMUNITIES OF DOMBES AND OF TEGELEN IN THE PROCESS OF THE SUPPRESSION OF THEIR MONASTERY PRESENT AN INVENTORY OF THE POSSIBILITIES AND DIFFICULTIES ENCOUNTERED.

YES	19	NO	0	ABS	3	<b>Proposition accepted</b>
-----	----	----	---	-----	---	-----------------------------

**VOTE 52:** THIS REPORT WILL BE SENT TO THE SECRETARIATE OF THE GENERALATE FOR DISTRIBUTION THROUGHOUT THE ORDER.

YES	20	NO	0	ABS	1	<b>Proposition accepted</b>
-----	----	----	---	-----	---	-----------------------------

## **2.3 Superiors**

### **2.3.1 Superiors *ad nutum***

Following Vote 101 of the GCm 2002, the legislation concerning Superiors *ad nutum* will be reviewed at the General Chapter of 2005.

Dom Timothy presented an overview of the situation:

A monastic community has a fundamental right to elect its superior. Having a superior *ad nutum* has traditionally been considered a temporary situation, to help a community towards an election. If the situation persisted, it would be considered at the next General Chapter. Recently, however, there has been a tendency to perceive a superior *ad nutum* as having a three-year "term".

Prolonging the "term" beyond three years brought the issue to the attention of the Congregation for Religious: to them, it is a breach of the law to deny to an autonomous community its right to have a major superior. But the opposite can be argued: the limited authority of a superior *ad nutum* encourages the community to an election and so underlines the importance of that right.

Some of the difficulties of our present legislation are: whether a Father Immediate is bound to consult the abbess and community of a monastery of nuns when appointing someone to exercise the authority of Father Immediate in their regard; whether a non-priest superior can exercise jurisdiction by appointing confessors to communities of nuns; whether a superior *ad nutum* appointed by a superior *ad nutum* continues to have authority if the appointing superior *ad nutum* ceases to hold that position.

Recently one Father Immediate appointed a 'claustral prior' to fulfill the office of superior for a short time, thus avoiding the complications involved in appointing a superior *ad nutum*.

Appointing a superior *ad nutum* in order to "try him out" as superior goes against our tradition. The growing number of superiors *ad nutum* seems to be related to the difficulty of finding suitable candidates to be superior, and to the issue of 'precarity'. And perhaps we have too many monasteries to be able to produce a sufficient number of capable superiors.

(See Annexe II)

The procedure is complicated. A Father Immediate has to be very careful to carry out all the necessary formalities.

- It seems anomalous that a Father Immediate is not bound to consult the abbess and community of a monastery of nuns when appointing someone to exercise the authority of Father Immediate in their regard.
- It would be good to know about all the different kinds of problems that have emerged when trying to put the decisions of the MGM 2002 into practice. But perhaps not enough time has yet elapsed for all the consequences to become clear?
- We must take care to safeguard the right of our communities to elect their superior. This is not the norm in the Church: most religious superiors are appointed by a higher authority, not elected by the community. So we should try to promote the courage and self-esteem of our communities to be able to elect their superior. We should not name superiors *ad nutum* without strong reasons for it.
- A working paper on this subject would be good.

**VOTE 53:** WE WISH THE REVIEW OF THE LEGISLATION CONCERNING THE *SUPERIOR AD NUTUM* VOTED ON AT THE GENERAL CHAPTERS OF 2002 BE TREATED BY:

[- the extraordinary procedure		Yes 2	No 21	Abs 2]	
- THE ORDINARY PROCEDURE					
YES	24	NO	0	ABS	1

**Proposition accepted**

**VOTE 54:** A WORKING PAPER WILL BE PREPARED, WHICH WILL SHOW THE COMPLEXITY OF THE SITUATION CREATED BY THE DECISIONS TAKEN IN 2002, AND OFFER SOME SOLUTIONS TO RESOLVE THE PROBLEMS.

YES	25	(unanimous)			
-----	----	-------------	--	--	--

**Proposition accepted**

**VOTE 55:** THIS DOCUMENT WILL BE WRITTEN BY:

[- one person :		Yes 9	No 12	Abs 4]	
[- a commission of three persons		Yes 9	No 10	Abs 4]	
- THE LAW COMMISSION					
YES	17	NO	4	ABS	4

**Proposition accepted**

### 2.3.2 Non-priest superiors

The Region of the Isles wishes that the question of superiors who are not priests be put on the programme of the MGM (cf. minutes of the Isles Regional Meeting, March 2004, p. 24). Some communities have difficulty in finding a superior; the possibility of electing a monk who is not a priest would give them a wider choice. To overcome the canonical problems involved, it might be possible for the Father Immediate to hold ecclesiastical jurisdiction and to delegate as much as possible to the local abbot. The monk would be blessed as abbot, and could be ordained later. The roles of both abbot and priest are services, but they are two different calls. One does not have to be a priest to serve in the ministry of abbot.

Moving forward on this issue might also open the possibility of giving abbesses more jurisdiction in their own monasteries; and the same principles could apply to the question of an Abbess General.

- This subject is related to the question of having a single General Chapter, which provides an opportunity for us to redefine the canonical nature of the Order. It seems useful to explore the topic.
- This subject has come up a number of times in the past. We probably have not moved very much from where we were a few years ago.

- Dom Bernardo explained that other Orders and Congregations continue to request of the Congregation for Religious the possibility of non-priest superiors, even though this has recently been refused. We should continue to state our position and desires. As an Order we are a special case: a clerical Order *sui generis*, with 70 abbesses who are not clerics, and this fact may help to gain the possibility for the monks also.

**VOTE 56:** WE WISH THE QUESTION OF NON-PRIEST SUPERIORS TO BE PLACED ON THE PROGRAMME OF THE MGM OF 2005.

YES 15 NO 1 ABS 9

**Proposition accepted**

**VOTE 57:** THIS QUESTION WILL BE TREATED BY:

[ - the extraordinary procedure Yes 0 No 23 Abs 2]

- THE ORDINARY PROCEDURE

YES 19 NO 1 ABS 5

**Proposition accepted**

**VOTE 58:** A WORKING PAPER WILL BE WRITTEN.

YES 23 NO 0 ABS 2

**Proposition accepted**

See Votes 62 and 63

### 2.3.3 The difficulty of finding superiors

The region of the Isles wishes to place on the programme of the MGM the problem which is experienced by some houses of finding a superior. Electing a monk/nun who holds a key position in his/her own community to be superior in another community may have a debilitating effect overall. The last MGM voted that a member of the Abbot General's council cannot be elected as superior except in his/her own community. But a local abbot/abbess has no similar protection for council members. Why do we have difficulty in electing abbots/abbesses? Is there a lack of faith in the role? Are people prepared for leadership?

- If a monk from one community is elected superior of another monastery, should he not consult his abbot before accepting the election? At the moment he does not have to do so. It does not seem right that a monk can accept election in another community when his own abbot is not even aware that this election was a possibility.
- But a community has a right to elect as its superior any monk of the Order, in accordance with C.39. Why should it be denied that right? To take away a community's right to manage its economy or the formation of its own members would be considered a grave matter. It is also a grave matter to prevent a community from electing its superior.
- Attempting to form a successor is very dangerous. But there are ways of exercising leadership which permit others to be formed as superiors. A superior who practices subsidiarity, respecting the officials of the monastery, will create an environment where there will probably be more people able to carry out the service of leadership. But superiors who are overpowering and 'omnipresent' are more likely to have succession difficulties.
- Some communities seem more comfortable with a superior *ad nutum* than with having an election, because the members have not been adequately formed to accept each other and to discover the potential within the community.
- The problems seem to be pastoral rather than juridical. We need to look more at educating people and communities, and elaborating at a spiritual level what authority is. It might be helpful to have a paper on formation to leadership and its exercise in a healthy way.

**VOTE 59:** WE WISH TO PLACE THE QUESTION CONCERNING THE DIFFICULTY OF FINDING SUPERIORS ON THE PROGRAMME OF THE MGM.

YES 10 NO 9 ABS 6 **Proposition accepted**

**VOTE 60:** THIS QUESTION WILL BE TREATED BY:

[- the extraordinary procedure Yes 2 No 23 Abs 0]

- THE ORDINARY PROCEDURE

YES 10 NO 7 ABS 7 **Proposition accepted**

**VOTE 61:** A WORKING PAPER WILL BE WRITTEN.

YES 17 NO 4 ABS 4 **Proposition accepted**

**VOTE 62:** A COMMISSION WILL WRITE ONE AND / OR THE OTHER DOCUMENT.  
(I.E. THE WORKING PAPER ON NON-PRIEST SUPERIORS AND / OR THE WORKING PAPER ON THE DIFFICULTIES OF FINDING SUPERIORS)

YES 22 NO 0 ABS 3 **Proposition accepted**

**VOTE 63:** THE WORKING PAPER ON NON-PRIEST SUPERIORS AND THE DIFFICULTY OF FINDING SUPERIORS WILL BE CONFIDED TO A COMMISSION COMPOSED OF MEMBERS OF THE REGION OF THE ISLES AND CHOSEN BY IT.

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

## 2.4 The functioning of the MGM

### 2.4.1 The majority required in votes

The Law Commission raised this point at its last meeting, proposing a text for reflection in the regions (cf. minutes of the Law Commission, Rome 2003, p. 12). It is a matter of clarification and of getting away from the hesitation which arises at the time of taking votes. This is necessary especially in the light of a single General Chapter. It is important to know in advance what majority is required for this or that point.

Not all the regions had studied this point, but all the members of the Central Commissions agreed that we need to continue studying this matter before taking a decision at the Chapters. From the point of view of a single Chapter, failure to obtain a 2/3 majority for a proposed vote might perhaps indicate that the subject needs to mature further. However, some thought that only important points such as changes to the Constitutions – and perhaps also to Statutes – should need a 2/3 majority. We need to clarify these issues.

A working paper, based on the text of the Law Commission and the reflections of the regions, would permit this point to be treated by simplified procedure at the beginning of the MGM.

**VOTE 64:** WE WISH TO PLACE THE QUESTION OF THE MAJORITY REQUIRED IN VOTES ON THE PROGRAMME OF THE MGM OF 2005.

YES 15 NO 3 ABS 6 **Proposition accepted**

**VOTE 65:** WE WISH THIS QUESTION TO BE TREATED BY THE SIMPLIFIED PROCEDURE.

YES 23 NO 0 ABS 2 **Proposition accepted**

**VOTE 66:** A WORKING PAPER WILL BE WRITTEN BY THE LAW COMMISSION.

YES 22 NO 0 ABS 3 **Proposition accepted**

### 2.4.2 Delegates

Three regions (RE, Isles, Canada) are in favour of the delegates to the General Chapter being considered as full members, with the right to vote. RE specified that this right should be given for the MGM of 2005. In this region the delegates play a very active role.

One region (RIM) thinks that the character of the General Chapters as a meeting of abbots and abbesses should be conserved, and that the participation of delegates does not imply that they have a right to vote.

The USA region asked for a working paper on this question.

- At Poyo in 1993 a text was written on the role of the delegates, which was read on the last day of the MGM, but which has not been discussed at the Chapters since then. At the MGMs of 1996, 1999 and 2002, the delegates gave reports by language groups.
- This is quite a controversial point in the Order. The role of the delegates varies a lot from one region to another, according to the number of houses in the region, and the distance between houses.
- RE asks for the unification of the criteria relating to the role of the delegates in the regional conferences, and RIM wants their role in each regional conference to be defined. But it is important that each region keep its own way of doing things, and that we do not establish norms that are too strict.
- Putting this point on the agenda – which does not seem to meet with much opposition – should include the possibility of giving the right to vote to delegates.
- Vatican II asked for greater participation by delegates, grass-roots members, in the legislative bodies of religious Orders, and our Order is evolving in this direction. The Chapter could be considered more as a Chapter of the Order than as a Chapter of Superiors.
- The USA region asks for a working paper situating the subject in the context of the nature of the central authority of the General Chapters.
- This subject evokes many reactions. There is a fear of falling into a kind of ‘democratisation’, and a historical study of the General Chapters could be useful. In the earliest times it was a matter of the conventual Chapter of Cîteaux meeting with the abbots of the daughter houses. We must also take present-day theology into account, and the contemporary life of the Church with its strong sense of the People of God.
- It would be good to deepen our understanding of representativity. Whom do the delegates represent? In some regions they know only their own community. At the moment some think that only the abbots and abbesses represent their communities. This question of the delegates touches on that of the service of authority.
- The basic point is the presence of non-superiors at the Chapter. What is the goal of their presence? Then we have to think about their mode of participation. Why not dissociate the participation of non-superiors from regional representation, and choose them by some other method? The working paper should consider all these points.
- RE asks that this question be treated by the simplified procedure, in the hope that the delegates could have the right to vote in 2005. This procedure means having a document which would be sufficient to take a vote.
- But by giving a positive response too quickly, we risk having no further reflection on the subject. The ordinary procedure would allow us to deepen and to understand better all that this question involves.

The first vote responds to the request of RE.

**VOTE 67:** WE WISH THAT THE QUESTION CONCERNING THE ROLE OF THE DELEGATES AT THE GENERAL CHAPTERS BE PLACED ON THE PROGRAMME OF THE MGM AND THAT IT BE TREATED BY SIMPLIFIED PROCEDURE, SO THAT THE DELEGATES MIGHT POSSIBLY BE ABLE TO VOTE AT THIS MGM OF 2005.

YES 7 NO 16 ABS 2 Proposition rejected

**VOTE 68:** WE WISH THAT THE QUESTION CONCERNING THE ROLE OF THE DELEGATES AT THE GENERAL CHAPTERS BE PLACED ON THE PROGRAMME OF THE MGM.

YES 23 NO 2 ABS 0 **Proposition accepted**

**VOTE 69:** THIS QUESTION WILL BE TREATED BY THE EXTRAORDINARY PROCEDURE:

YES 8 NO 14 ABS 3 Proposition rejected

The question of delegates will therefore be treated by the **ordinary procedure**.

**VOTE 70:** WE WISH THAT A DOCUMENT BE WRITTEN WHICH WOULD PROVIDE A BROAD STUDY AT THE HISTORICAL AND THEOLOGICAL LEVELS. THIS STUDY WOULD ALSO INCLUDE AN UNDERSTANDING OF THE MEANING OF *REPRESENTATION*, AND WOULD ALSO ENVISAGE THE POSSIBILITY OF GRANTING THE RIGHT OF VOTE TO DELEGATES.

YES 20 NO 0 ABS 5 **Proposition accepted**

**VOTE 71:** THIS DOCUMENT WILL BE WRITTEN BY A COMMISSION OF 3 PERSONS.

YES 15 NO 5 ABS 5 **Proposition accepted**

Nominations for this commission:

Dom Marcos of Cardeña  
 Dom Ivo of Westmalle  
 Sr Lourdes of Armenteira  
 Sr Lily of Glencairn  
 Dom Armand of Scourmont  
 Br Enrique of Sobrado  
 M. Marie of Glencairn  
 Br Denis of Mount Melleray  
 Fr Benedict of Westmalle  
 Dom Germain of Koutaba  
 Dom Joseph of Mount Saint Bernard

Result of the vote:

<b>M. Marie</b>	<b>11 votes</b>	<b>elected</b>
<b>Br. Enrique</b>	<b>11 votes</b>	<b>elected</b>
Dom Armand	10 votes	
Dom Marcos	10 votes	

A second ballot was necessary to elect the third person:

<b>Dom Armand</b>	<b>15 votes</b>	<b>elected</b>
Dom Marcos	9 votes	

So the document will be written by M. Marie, Br Enrique and Dom Armand.

## 2.5 Other points for the agenda

### 2.5.1 Illah

The community of Illah in Nigeria has requested incorporation into the Order. (See the information given by Dom Francis Kline at the MGM 2002: Minutes, session 31.6).

Illah was founded in 1983 by Fr Abraham, the founder of Awhum. At present the community numbers 23 monks. In 2003 Dom Jude of Bamenda, Mother Margaret Mary of Abakaliki, and Dom Charles of Victoria made a visit to Illah. The brothers live a good monastic life. They can meet their day-to-day financial needs. They have a regular monastery and have just built a church with the help of local benefactors. Dom Bruno, superior of Illah, attended the last RAFMA regional meeting.

It is hoped that Nsugbe will eventually accept the paternity of Illah, but that will not be possible for some time. For the moment, Victoria would be willing to assume paternity if Mepkin provides financial support.

- If we decide to put the request of Illah on the agenda of the MGM, it might be useful first to have another visit by two or three members of the Order.
- Before the MGM, Victoria must vote to accept paternity of Illah, without any conditions concerning financial help from Mepkin.
- The rank at which Illah would be incorporated would be for the MGM to decide, but Dom Bruno and RAFMA have indicated a preference for the status of simple priory.

#### ***The next four votes were taken by the Central Commission of Abbots***

**VOTE 72:** WE PLACE THE REQUEST OF THE COMMUNITY OF ILLAH FOR INCORPORATION INTO THE ORDER, ON THE PROGRAMME OF THE NEXT GENERAL CHAPTER.

YES 15 (unanimous)

**Proposition accepted**

**VOTE 73:** WITH A VIEW TO THE INCORPORATION INTO THE ORDER OF THE COMMUNITY OF ILLAH, WE ASK THAT A NEW VISIT TO THIS COMMUNITY BE CARRIED OUT.

YES 15 (unanimous)

**Proposition accepted**

**VOTE 74:** THIS VISIT WILL BE CARRIED OUT BY TWO CAPITULANTS.

YES 13 NO 0 ABS 2

**Proposition accepted**

**VOTE 75:** THESE VISITORS WILL BE DESIGNATED BY

[- the Central Commissions: Yes 1 No 10 Abs 4 Proposition rejected]

- THE ABBOT GENERAL

YES 13 NO 0 ABS 2

**Proposition accepted**

**VOTE 76:** WE WISH TO INVITE THE SUPERIOR OF ILLAH TO THE MGM OF 2005.

*(Vote of both Central Commissions)*

YES 25 (unanimous)

**Proposition accepted**

### 2.5.2 Awhum

The community of Awhum has requested to be raised to the status of an abbey. The monastery has fulfilled all the necessary requirements. The conventual chapter has voted unanimously in favour of this petition, the conventual chapter of the mother

house (Genesee) has voted overwhelmingly in favour, and the superiors of RAFMA also support it unanimously. It is on the agenda for the MGM.

### 2.5.3 Nsugbe

The community of Nsugbe has requested to be raised to the status of a simple priory. It fulfils the necessary requirements. The economy is not quite viable, but this has to be assessed in the overall African context. For the last five years the abbot of Nunraw has been the Father Immediate of Nsugbe, helped especially by the abbots of Bethlehem and Mellifont. A permanent monastery has been built; there are vocations; the brothers live a good monastic life. RAFMA unanimously supports the petition. It is on the agenda for the MGM.

### 2.5.4 Request for spiritual affiliation

Dom Santiago, councillor of the Abbot General, read the request of the *Famiglia monastica Benedettina Fraternità di Gesù* for spiritual affiliation with our Order.

This is a contemporary monastic group, founded in Italy (Lanuvio, diocese of Rome), made up of monks, nuns and lay people, in the western Benedictine / Cistercian tradition. It has been approved by the Church by a number of decrees (1971, 1981, 1990, 1999). The Abbot General and his Council saw their Constitutions and sent two councillors with the Abbot of Frattochie to visit them. This group understands its monastic life as being “for” the world, and they welcome the marginalised, immigrants, and drug addicts, to help them. They are also pioneers in the area of agricultural development.

After a brief discussion about this interesting group, it seemed that it is too early to put it on the agenda of the MGM. We need to wait and see how it will evolve.

**VOTE 77:** WE WILL PUT THE REQUEST OF THE *FAMIGLIA MONASTICA BENEDITTINA FRATERNITA DI GESÙ* FOR SPIRITUAL AFFLIATION ON THE PROGRAMME OF THE MGM 2005.

YES	1	NO	13	ABS	11	Proposition rejected
-----	---	----	----	-----	----	----------------------

## 3. Organisation of the MGM

### 3.1 Commission for the formulation of votes

- The USA region wished to have a vote formulating committee, to help the Coordinating Commission.
- The experience of having such a committee at the last USA regional meeting was very positive. The moderators were able to be attentive to the dynamic of the sessions, the people assigned to formulate the votes were free just to listen.
- However, according to the *Procedures* of the MGM, this is part of the work of the Coordinating Commission. The Coordinating Commission proposed that instead of an *ad hoc* commission (whose members could not be part of other *ad hoc* commissions), there would be three persons to formulate votes, but leaving the final word to the Coordinating Commission.
- We need to be aware of the qualities such persons would need: to know how to listen to what is being said; to know how to formulate proposals arising from a discussion; to have the capacity to work with others. We would also need to have someone for each of the main languages used in the MGM, able to communicate among themselves and to check translations.



- The Coordinating Commission would prefer to be able themselves to chose the people with the necessary capacity.
- These people would not necessarily have to be capitulants, but would have to be present at in the MGM.
- It was suggested that, to take account of this work, the number of secretaries of the Coordinating Commission could be increased, but this Commission already has six members and a secretary, which is a considerable number for the smooth progress of the work.
- A straw vote was taken (by raising of hands) to see if people wanted an *ad hoc* commission, at this Central Commission meeting, to formulate votes arising from this discussion, or if they preferred to leave it to the Coordinating Commission to do so:

in favour of an *ad hoc* commission:                   **5 votes**

in favour of the Coordinating Commission   **13 votes**

**VOTE 78:** WE ARE IN FAVOUR OF THE COORDINATING COMMISSION BEING HELPED, FOR THE FORMULATION OF VOTES, BY THREE PEOPLE, CHOSEN BY IT, THUS TAKING INTO ACCOUNT THE PROPOSAL OF THE US REGION.

YES   20   NO   3   ABS   2                   **Proposition accepted**

## 3.2 Conferences and panels

### 3.2.1 Conferences of the Abbot General

- The Abbot General should be free regarding the number of conferences he wishes to give during the MGM.
- A desire was expressed that the conferences should afterwards be discussed in commissions. As regards discussion in plenary session, one person regretted that this was not done in 2002. However, we have to be conscious of the limitations of discussion in the aula, and to consider whether it is more important to give priority to feedback from the commissions.

**VOTE 79:** WE WISH THE ABBOT GENERAL TO GIVE SOME CONFERENCES AT THE NEXT MGM.

YES   24   NO   0   ABS   1                   **Proposition accepted**

**VOTE 80:** THESE CONFERENCES WILL BE FOLLOWED BY A DISCUSSION IN THE PLENARY ASSEMBLY.

YES   13   NO   5   ABS   6                   **Proposition accepted**

**VOTE 81:** THESE CONFERENCES WILL BE FOLLOWED BY A DISCUSSION IN THE MIXED COMMISSIONS.

YES   16   NO   5   ABS   3                   **Proposition accepted**

### 3.2.2 Other conferences. Panels

- Conferences and panels can provide an opportunity for participation for some capitulants who would have more difficulty making an intervention in the general discussions.
- It is important that the subjects of these conferences and panels should not be cut off from the real life of our communities, and that they be connected to the house reports. It is easy to know what themes connect with the life of the communities.
- Regarding panels, it seems important to ensure that there is real interaction amongst the participants, that is not just a series of little conferences.

- The USA region suggested eight themes which could be dealt with by panels (cf. USA regional report). We would like to add to it the subject of formation.

**VOTE 82:** WE WISH THAT ONE OR TWO CONFERENCES BE GIVEN BY CAPITULANTS.

YES 2 NO 16 ABS 5 **Proposition rejected**

**VOTE 83:** WE WISH TO HAVE PANELS AT THE NEXT MGM.

YES 23 NO 0 ABS 2 **Proposition accepted**

**VOTE 84:** WE WISH TO HAVE TWO PANELS.

YES 11 **Proposition accepted**

[one panel YES 10]

[three panels YES 1]

[four panels YES 0]

The themes for the conferences and panels will be those from the proposed list which obtain the most votes, taking into account the desired number of conferences and panels.

**VOTE 85:** WE WISH TO HAVE THE FOLLOWING SUBJECTS FOR THE CONFERENCES OR PANELS:

- an aspect of formation or a subject connected with formation **17 votes**
- methods of active recruitment **2 votes**
- monastic solitude **13 votes**
- care and place of elderly and sick members **3 votes**
- reconciliation within the community **10 votes**
- suitable forms of fraternal correction **8 votes**
- commissions of aid for the future **12 votes**
- concrete points form the life of the communities **0 votes**
- points emerging from the study of the house reports **23 votes**
- lay associates **14 votes**

**VOTE 86:** WE LEAVE IT TO THE ABBOT GENERAL AND HIS COUNCIL TO CHOOSE THE TOPICS FOR THE TWO PANELS FROM THE LIST OF THOSE SELECTED.

YES 21 NO 0 ABS 2 **Proposition accepted**

### 3.3 Regional reports

- At the MGM 2002, following a request from the Canadian region, regional reports were presented for the first time. It would be interesting to hear reports from regions other than the four chosen in 2002.
- It is helpful to know how, within a region, communities can encourage one another and give mutual help, at the level of work, personnel, etc.
- There should be great freedom as to how to draw up these reports, as this allows us to appreciate the diversity between regions.
- The four regions which are currently in a process of restructuring will meet prior to the MGM, and the report of that meeting could be presented.

**VOTE 87:** WE WISH THAT REGIONAL REPORTS BE PRESENTED AT THE NEXT MGM.

YES 20 NO 1 ABS 4 **Proposition accepted**

**VOTE 88:** WE WISH THAT THE 4 REGIONS WHO ARE IN A PROCESS OF A NEW DISTRIBUTION OF THEIR HOUSES GIVE A REPORT AT THE MGM.

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

**VOTE 89:** WE WISH THAT ONE OTHER REGION PRESENT A REPORT.

YES 11 [for 2 regions: 10 Yes; for 3 regions: 0] **Proposition accepted**

*In choosing this region, we will take into account the 4 reports read in 2002 and the 4 regions involved in the process of restructuring.*

**VOTE 90:** THE ASPAC/ORIENS REGION WILL PRESENT A REPORT AT THE MGM 2005.  
YES 13 [USA: 4 votes; Isles: 2 votes; Remila: 1 vote] **Proposition accepted**

### 3.4 Persons to be invited

Suggestions were made about whom to invite to the MGM 2005, and then the following vote was taken:

**VOTE 91:** WE WISH TO INVITE THE FOLLOWING TO THE MGM OF 2005: (*absolute majority required*)

- Dom Ambrose **25 votes**
- Dom Marie-Gérard, president of the Law Commission **24 votes**  
(*These two people will be invited for the whole of the MGM.*)
- the new Prefect of the Congregation for Consecrated Life **21 votes**
- the Abbot General of the Order of Cîteaux and/or the Abbot President of a Congregation, chosen by the Abbot General O.C. **20 votes**
- the Abbot Primate of the Benedictines **17 votes**
- the Prioress General of the Bernardines of Esquermes **13 votes**
- a representative of the lay Cistercians **23 votes**

**VOTE 92:** WE WISH THAT THESE PERSONS BE INVITED FOR A DAY OR TWO.  
YES 23 NO 0 ABS 0 **Proposition accepted**

**VOTE 93:** WE WISH TO PROVIDE AN OPPORTUNITY FOR A CISTERCIAN LAY ASSOCIATE TO MAKE A PRESENTATION IN THE PLENARY ASSEMBLY.  
YES 21 NO 2 ABS 2 **Proposition accepted**

**VOTE 94:** WE LEAVE IT TO THE ABBOT GENERAL TO CHOOSE THE LAY CISTERCIAN ASSOCIATE WHO WILL ATTEND THE MGM.  
YES 22 NO 0 ABS 0 **Proposition accepted**

### 3.5 Third delegate for RAFMA

Dom Charles of Victoria asked, in the name of his region, if it would be possible to invite the two secretaries for formation of the RAFMA region. It seemed better to give RAFMA the possibility of having a third delegate again, as happened previously in 1996, 1999 and 2002.

**VOTE 95:** WE ACCEPT THE REQUEST FROM RAFMA TO ADD TO THE TWO DELEGATES ALREADY FORESEEN BY THE PRESENT NORMS A THIRD REPRESENTATIVE FOR THE NEXT MGM.  
YES 23 NO 0 ABS 1 **Proposition accepted**

### 3.6 Expert

The members of the Central Commissions received the report made by Dom Carlos of Sobrado after the MGM 2002. Having read it privately, there was a discussion in the group; the following were the main points:

- This report is very concrete. It would be useful for all capitulants.
- This report helps us to ask the question: is it necessary to have an expert? We have an agenda, a very precise procedure, a commission to moderate the sessions, presidents and secretaries for the commissions, and the MGM works well. To what extent is the presence of an expert justified? Dom Carlos' report is on the whole positive. The results of a meeting of such a diverse group of people is almost a miracle, especially taking into account the short amount of time available for the work to be done.
- The USA region unanimously wished to have an expert, especially for giving help to the mixed commissions, who could consult the expert when necessary.
- Many, however, did not see the need for an expert (and recalled the negative experience of the MGM 1996), and as Dom Carlos is now a capitulant, he is not available for this service. The Coordinating Commission functions satisfactorily, and the interventions of some more experienced capitulants also help things to run smoothly.
- But there could be problems, and we have to remember that about one third of the capitulants will be participating in the MGM for the first time. The Chapters take place only once in three years, and are very significant in the life of the Order. We need to be able to listen to one another. The role of the expert is more important in the meetings of small groups (mixed commissions, Coordinating Commission), than in plenary assembly. We have much to gain and little to lose, but would we find someone to succeed Dom Carlos in the Order?

**VOTE 96:** WE WISH TO HAVE AN EXPERT PRESENT AT THE MGM OF 2005.

YES 12 NO 11 ABS 2 **Proposition accepted**

The discussion indicated a preference for somebody from within the Order, but the vote did not exclude the possibility of having recourse to someone who is not a member of our Order. It would be necessary, however, that this person be very familiar with our Constitutions and our structures, and could attend a regional meeting. We would also need to find someone who is not at either extreme, of doing too much or of doing too little. We have had both experiences. Some names were suggested.

**VOTE 97:** WE LEAVE IT TO THE ABBOT GENERAL AND HIS COUNCIL TO CHOOSE THE EXPERT FOR THE MGM.

YES 21 NO 1 ABS 1 **Proposition accepted**

It was thought that Dom Carlos' evaluation of the MGM might be useful to improve our method of functioning and to help those who will participate in the MGM 2005.

**VOTE 98:** WE WISH THAT THE REPORT OF DOM CARLOS BE SENT TO ALL CAPITULANTS.

YES 21 NO 0 ABS 4 **Proposition accepted**

### 3.7 Personnel

Suggestions were invited for names of people to fulfil the different services during the MGM 2005: a coordinator of the secretariate, a secretary and an assistant for each of the three principal languages, a secretary with overall responsibility for the minutes in three languages, interpreters, translators of texts (some of whom need to be able to stay after the end of the MGM). Each region should think about this and propose names to the Abbot General's Council. Descriptions of the requirements and job descriptions could be given.

The new Procedures of the MGM envisage only one secretary for the Coordinating Commission. S/he is to be chosen by the Central Commissions. At the end of the MGM 2002, Sr Madeleine (Vitorchiano) was chosen by the Coordinating Commission of the General Chapter of Abbesses. This choice was ratified by the members of the Central Commissions.

### 3.8 Liturgy

Suggestions were made by the regions:

1. That the unity between the monks and the nuns should be clearly apparent during the celebration of the Eucharist.
2. That all should wear a cowl or an alb for the Eucharist.
3. That there should be a master of ceremonies (who could also be sacristan).
4. That the number of concelebrants should be limited.
5. That the Eucharistic Prayer should be said in Latin (apart from the Preface).

The discussion showed that in this area, attitudes are very different.

- Either order or creativity should be given priority.
- For some, it is important that things remain simple.
- It was also suggested that homilies should not be too long, and that the introduction to the Mass should not be turned into a homily.
- The actual place in which the liturgy will be celebrated will greatly determine the style of the celebration.
- The fact that the liturgies are prepared by different regions allows for greater diversity in the celebrations.
- For proposition 1, it is a matter of deciding the means: habits, place, etc, to manifest unity, but we also wish to have some liberty.

**VOTE 99:** WE WISH THAT AN MASTER OF CEREMONIES WHO COULD ALSO BE SACRISTAN, OR WHO COULD BE HELPED AT THIS LEVEL, BE DESIGNATED TO REGULATE THE CELEBRATION OF THE EUCHARIST, SO THAT IT CAN MANIFEST AS MUCH AS POSSIBLE THE UNITY OF THE ASSEMBLY.

YES 22 NO 1 ABS 2 **Proposition accepted**

**VOTE 100:** WE WISH MONKS AND NUNS TO WEAR THE COWL (OR ALB) FOR THE CELEBRATION OF THE EUCHARIST.

YES 7 NO 13 ABS 5 Proposition rejected

**VOTE 101:** AS REGARDS HOMILIES, WE WISH THAT THEY BE LIMITED TO THE OPENING AND CLOSING DAYS OF THE MGM AND TO SUNDAYS.

YES 19 NO 0 ABS 6 **Proposition accepted**

**VOTE 102:** WE WISH THE CANON OF THE MASS TO BE SAID IN LATIN.

YES 6 NO 8 ABS 11 Proposition rejected

*N.B. We wish, however, to retain the possibility of saying the Canon of the Mass in Latin sometimes.*

Since the result of Vote 99 was positive, nominations were made. Some thought it preferable that the MC / sacristan not be a capitulant nor a delegate. The following were proposed:

Dom Hugues of Neiges	Fr Loris of Frattochie
Dom Ivo of Westmalle	Fr Philippe of Mokoto
Br Francisco of Sobrado	Dom Marie-Gérard of La Trappe.

**Dom Ivo** of Westmalle was **elected**.

## II. PLENARY COUNCIL OF THE ABBOT GENERAL

### 1. Approval of the new foundation of Vitorchiano

Mother Rosaria, abbess of Vitorchiano, has asked for approval of the foundation which her community is preparing in the Czech Republic. Building is due to commence shortly and it would be too late to wait until the General Chapter to receive this approval.

*Presentation of the foundation of Vitorchiano, O.L. of Moldava in the Czech Republic*

“Information has already been given in plenary assembly at the MGM 2002 about the initial circumstances of this project of a foundation in the Czech Republic. At the end of April 2002, the Conventual Chapter of Vitorchiano took a straw vote to evaluate the possibility of a foundation.

- The resources of the community, in terms of people and of economic means, were and are good.
- The presence in the community of some Czech sisters has been perceived as a sign given by God to show us the place for a new foundation.
- The Archbishop of Prague, Cardinal Miloslav Vlk, has several times invited us to his diocese, showing great interest in the establishment of a community of Cistercian nuns in his large and complex ecclesial community.

In the same plenary assembly of the MGM, there was mention of a possible donation of a property in the Archdiocese of Prague, but that donation could not be accepted because there were several conditions attached. We spent much of last year searching for a more suitable place, and eventually found one: it is located in central Bohemia, in the district of Benešov, near the town of Poličani, about 80 km from Prague. It is in a peaceful and attractive area, overlooking the Moldava valley, and it comprises about 50 hectares. We were able to proceed to a regular purchase, by the grace of God, using the reserve funds from our work; but in order to build the monastery we will certainly need the help of many people.

Last January Sr Lucia Tartara, who was novice mistress, was named superior of the foundation, and the other foundresses were designated. The group is composed of 10 sisters in all, of whom 5 are Czech, 4 Italian and one Hungarian; among them it is possible to find the right people to take on community responsibilities. Their first tasks for now are to learn the language, to work out a liturgy in Czech, and to draft a plan for the first phase of the construction. By the second half of this year, the construction work on the basic facilities should begin (boundaries of the property, water, electricity, sewage, etc.), along with the building of a 15-room guest house that will be the temporary house for the foundresses, until the monastery is ready.

Based on these facts, and with the approval of the Father Immediate, the conventual chapter of Vitorchiano proceeded to a deliberative, 2/3rds majority vote on the 19<sup>th</sup> of March (see Statute on Foundations, §8), with the following result:

YES 52 NO 4

Because we want to start construction on the property of Our Lady of Moldava, it seems to us appropriate to present the request of the approval of the foundation to the Abbot General and his Council, (see Statute on Foundations, §9) leaving it to them to determine whether it is fitting to grant it, in which case we will carry on with the building of the monastery as planned, or to defer the evaluation and approval until the next General Chapter of Abbesses. In this latter case, however, we would

still need some assurance of approval in order to carry on, in the manner outlined above, towards the realization of the foundation.”

- After reading this report, which does not mention who will be the Father Immediate, we were informed that the community of Frattocchie has voted to accept paternity of this new community: 11 yes; 4 no; 1 abs
- Up to now foundations have been approved by the branch of the Order concerned, but since the Council of the Abbot General is now mixed, the Abbot General asked if there would be any objections to the two Central Commissions voting together, as Plenary Council of the Abbot General.

**VOTE 103:** WE APPROVE THE FOUNDATION OF VITORCHIANO IN THE CZECH REPUBLIC.

YES 23 NO 0 ABS 1

**Proposition accepted**

**VOTE 104:** WE APPROVE THE DESIGNATION OF THE ABBOT OF FRATTOCCHIE AS FATHER IMMEDIATE OF THE FOUNDATION OF VITORCHIANO IN THE CZECH REPUBLIC WHEN THIS FOUNDATION REACHES AUTONOMY.

YES 24 NO 0 ABS 0

**Proposition accepted**

## **2. Information on Marija Zvijezda**

Dom François de Place, Apostolic Administrator of this community, gave some information to the meeting about the current state of affairs there.

### III. DIVERS

#### 1. Election of the central secretary for formation

Sr Marie Pascale, having been elected at the end of the MGM 1996, was re-elected by the Central Commissions in 1998 and in 2001, each time for three years. She does not want to be re-elected. A letter of thanks for her long and fruitful service was sent to her.

The task of the Central Secretary for Formation is outlined in #70 of the *Ratio*. It is not a full-time job. Nominations were taken and the following were proposed:

Fr Elias of Gethsemani  
 Dom Etienne of Bellefontaine  
 Fr Marc-André of Mont-des-Cats  
 Sr Martina of Gedono  
 Fr Dominic of Victoria  
 Fr Philippe of Mokoto  
 Fr Lode of Orval  
 Fr Joël of Cîteaux  
 Sr Kathleen of Mississippi  
 Sr Pamela of Wrentham

On the first ballot, nobody obtained a majority:

Fr Elias	6 votes
Sr Kathleen	6 votes
Fr Lode	8 votes

On the second ballot:

Sr Kathleen	6 votes	
<b>Fr Lode</b>	<b>15 votes</b>	<b>elected</b>

#### 2. Information

##### 2.1 Tautra

M. Gail presented the following information.

The community at Tautra is considering requesting autonomy, as a simple priory, at the next General Chapter. No vote has yet been taken, and it has not been discussed at OLM.

Tautra was founded in 1999, and at the moment has eight solemnly professed sisters. One will return to her community in Belgium in due course. Six of the others are ready to change their stability. The economic situation is reasonably secure; a soap industry is doing well and last year provided 75% of the regular living expenses. Building work on a regular monastery will begin in September. The sisters are well inserted into the local community. A Norwegian postulant is expected later this year, but it is unlikely that the community will receive many vocations from Norway. OLM will be responsible for providing personnel for Tautra if there is need.

By the MGM 2005, Tautra will fulfil the conditions for becoming a simple priory, except that of having novices coming towards the end of their probation. Is this the right moment to request of the Chapter that Tautra become autonomous?

Points from the discussion:

- As regards personnel, the requirement for autonomy is six professed, of whom some may be temporary professed, and novices coming to the end of their



novitiate. Clearly a community of six or seven solemnly professed, stable members is in a much stronger position than one with e.g. three solemnly professed, three temporary professed, and two novices coming towards the end of their novitiate. The sisters at Tautra display strong commitment and love of the place; this is a great strength.

- Tautra could be compared with Tibirhine: there is a value in having a house in a place with little possibility of local recruitment, to give a monastic witness; or with Koutaba, the first Cistercian monastery in Africa, which for many years remained very small, in a strongly Muslim area, but is now growing.
- If the situation evolves, it will be possible to ask for this to be put on the agenda of the General Chapter at any time between now and then.

## 2.2 Projects of RAFMA

Dom Charles of Victoria, president of RAFMA, gave some information on two projects which are being undertaken by that region.

### 1. Formation Centre

To cater for the particular needs of RAFMA, it is hoped to set up a permanent centre for formation. A commission has been set up to look into the feasibility of the project. The community of Koutaba is building a new monastery, and when it is complete, the old building will be available to house this centre. The project is still at the suggestion stage, but communities are asked to consider making personnel (e.g. teachers) available to help in the future.

### 2. The review PACAM

A review entitled *Patrimoine Cistercien en Afrique et Madagascar* has been set up to provide a forum and to encourage exchange about Cistercian Patrimony in Africa and Madagascar. It is under the direction of Fr Dominic of Victoria.

## 2.3 Beatification of Fr. Cassant

Dom Jean-Marie of Désert gave some information on this subject.

The beatification ceremony has been fixed for Oct 3<sup>rd</sup> 2004, in Rome. All members of the Order are invited, but it is necessary to know soon how many want to attend. The course for English-speaking new superiors will take place at Tre Fontane beginning on September 29th, and the RIM – REM regional meeting will be held at Vitorchiano from October 4<sup>th</sup>, which means that the Order will be well represented. There will also be a good presence from the diocese of Toulouse and the diocese of Agen.

A commission, composed of monks and lay people, has been set up to study a number of projects concerning Fr Cassant at the monastery of Désert. They would particularly like to restore the chapel where Fr Malet, novice master of Fr Cassant, is buried. Then the master and the disciple could rest side by side. This chapel can be accessed in a way which does not disturb the community. This commission would also like to promote the spirituality of Fr Cassant by having some teaching about him *in situ*. Finally, a small book, written by the Vice-postulator, a monk of Désert, has been translated into English, Spanish and Portuguese. Each linguistic area should look after the distribution of this little book.

Other information will be found on the website of the Order.

### 3. Distribution of documents in the Order

From time to time there are problems related to the distribution of documents to all the houses of the Order.

There are three possible methods: by e-mail, by posting them on the Internet in a password-protected site, or by regular mail. Each one has its advantages and disadvantages.

It was suggested that all houses be asked to state their preferred means of receiving the documents of the Order.

These problems also bear on the question of communications within and between regions. It weakens communication within regions if documents cannot be accessed and read by all.

The importance of receiving regional reports in good time for the preparation of the Central Commission meetings was stressed. This needs to be kept in mind when fixing dates for regional meetings, and when deciding how to distribute the reports. When regional meetings are held too close to the Central Commission meetings, it causes problems. Everyone should be made aware of this.

## EVALUATION

All the participants gave their opinion of the work and of our stay at Scourmont during these days.

- As usual, all mentioned the very good welcome that we receive in the monasteries of our Order where we feel at home. This reaffirms our fraternal bonds, and contributes to the good working of the meeting. Scourmont, furthermore, has a beautiful park with a heavenly environment, and we were able to enjoy it thanks to a timetable that was not overloaded.
- The liturgy of the community, which was very well prepared, was much appreciated, as was the service of the brethren in the guest-house. Dom Armand appreciated the fact that the meeting was held in Scourmont: it was important for his community to have had this presence of all the members of the Central Commissions.
- The very good equipment for simultaneous translation facilitated the discussions.
- Those who were at a Central Commissions meeting for the first time were favourably impressed by the atmosphere of openness and respect which they found. In a group which is smaller than the MGM we have more opportunity to speak to each other one-to-one. It would be difficult to convey the experience of this week to the communities. In particular, the Abbot General was thanked for the manner of participation and his capacity to create a relaxed and easy climate.
- As always the Coordination Commission carried the heaviest burden of work and enabled the meeting to run smoothly, efficiently, and quickly. All would have liked to help this Commission more. In other Central Commission meetings the work was shared more with other people. Perhaps, for example, there could have been a commission or a person for the formulation of votes.
- The delegates from the regions were well prepared. They knew what their regions wanted and presented it clearly. This, combined with the efficient work of the Coordinating Commission to prepare the daily agenda, allowed us to see the work through without feeling fatigued or worried about the scarcity of time as happened on other occasions.

- But we wonder once again about the composition of the Central Commissions. The meeting went well but, for the preparation of the Chapters, is it necessary to have such a large meeting, bringing people from all over the world? When we were dealing with important “basic issues” like writing the Constitutions, collegiality, the two branches of the Order, this kind of meeting was understandable. Now, however, it is a matter of developing themes prepared by the regions, and we could envisage the regions being represented in some other kind of way, smaller in number, perhaps differently chosen.
- Perhaps we need to have more exchanges at the personal level, about how we are feeling when we arrive and when it is time to leave, what has struck us about our experience during these days, the difficulties and preoccupations which each one is undergoing, etc.
- When the wind blows very hard, everyone notices it. During these Central Commissions the wind was gentle, and sometimes we were hardly aware that it was blowing. We studied proposals from the regions about the authority of mixed commissions, about the restructuring of the Central Commissions, and of the regions. These are winds which might blow unnoticed, but which are going in the direction of a restructuring of the organs of the Order.

## **ABBOT GENERAL’S CLOSING TALK**

My words at the opening of these Central Commissions were very brief, which allows me to enlarge for a few minutes in these concluding remarks.

I begin with sincere thanks to everyone: the abbot and community of Scourmont; the crew of secretaries and translators, including the efficient and disciplined Coordinating Commission.

I wish to concentrate now on two points which seem important to me at the present moment in the Order. I offer them for your reflection and discernment.

### **1. Creativity and initiatives**

Considering what we have experienced during these days, it seems to me opportune to invite creativity and the taking of initiatives.

It would be interesting if the regions, in the future, just as they propose subjects for the agenda of the MGM, could likewise become more actively involved in its preparation. We have already done something along these lines by deciding to turn over certain working papers to some of the regions. It seems like an excellent idea, introducing a creative note into the preparation of the MGM.

Likewise, I think it might be interesting to pay more attention to the individual monks and nuns of the Order. When we propose candidates for the writing up of working papers, greater involvement of the grassroots would serve to increase interest in the work of the Chapters at the level of the local communities. Nowadays these documents can be worked out by e-mail, avoiding trips, meetings, and unnecessary expenses. A good example along these lines is the drawing up of the working paper on delegates to the MGM.

We all realise that at the community level the abbot and the abbess do not need to be tuned in to everything that happens; much less do they need to have an active or executive role in all the aspects of community life. This simple principle of group and community life can be applied at the level of the whole Order. Concretely, there are many regional initiatives which do not necessarily have to pass through the MGM to receive recognition and/or approbation. Let a few illustrations suffice, of subjects already approved by a small majority – which, by the way, means that they are still in process of maturing:

The matter of pastoral attention on the part of the General Chapters towards Fathers Immediate with a large number of filiations could have been drawn up at the level of one or several regions, and communicated later to the whole Order, using the good offices of the secretary of the Generalate.

The same could be said regarding ‘the difficulty of finding superiors’; and perhaps for the ‘restructuring of the Central Commissions’, and the report on the ‘difficulties encountered and lessons learned in the suppression of monasteries’.

## 2. Interculturality of our assemblies

The variety of backgrounds (countries and cultures), age (young, middle-aged, old) and sex (men and women) of the members of the Central Commissions, General Chapters, and the MGM, brings us to the matter of interculturality.

I believe that we have already initiated a process of consciousness-raising regarding this anthropological reality, but we still have some way to go. The world does not have only one centre, but many, we could say almost an infinite number.

In order not to fall into theoretical abstractions, I will share with you a few realities which could help us become aware and sensitise ourselves regarding the interculturality of the Order and of our assemblies of superiors. My words do not imply value judgements, but simply point out realities.

**Decisions:** Some cultures reach decisions by way of debates and majority votes: others by way of dialogues of consensus, without necessarily going on to a vote.

**The use of time:** It is clear that in the industrialized and technological cultures, time is measured in a mechanical and objective way by means of an instrument called the clock: the meeting begins at 3 o’clock, and it ends at 5 o’clock. In other cultures, with a different type or degree of development, time is affective and existentially determined: the meeting begins when everyone is present and prepared, and it ends when the subject has been thoroughly treated.

**Authority:** In some cultural settings, authority is recognised through its power to make decisions which oblige; in other settings, the weight of authority resides in its opportuneness and the wisdom of its suggestions.

**Conflicts:** For some cultures, conflicts are inevitable, and they are opportunities for learning. For others, conflicts have to be avoided by every means, and when they occur they are not to be gone over again; they have to be buried quickly.

**Ways of procedure:** The methods or procedures for arriving at goals are all relative. Cultures also have part in the cause of this variety. Some prefer pre-determined, fixed procedures, which increase the sense of security. Other cultures operate better with broad and open procedures, which leave room for the unforeseen and for last-minute improvisations.

**Perception:** Westerners, especially men, tend to perceive reality intellectually and analytically (they separate in order to know), while Orientals and others from southern cultures give first place to global and intuitive perception (they join in order to know). In the first case, what is important is what is differentiated; in the second case, what is unified.

**Tradition:** In cultures with long centuries of history, tradition is an ever-present reality, and an obligatory point of reference; in young cultures, tradition is invisible, something to be created and established. It is not unusual that in long-established cultures they move slowly and with obligatory reference to the past, while young cultures run, and are oriented to the future.

**Participation:** There are cultures which accentuate and prefer the spoken word and the auditory sense: they are all voice and hearing. Others prefer the sense of sight (with their small, beautiful eyes), and non-verbal communication or gestures. The first participate in meetings or assemblies in an active and effective way; the second in a passive and affective way. Each group participates according to its own way.

And the list could go on. But my intention is neither encyclopaedic nor dogmatic. I just wanted to offer a few simple observations which can be useful for continuing to grow in our cenobitic School of Charity.

To sum up: let us not fear to be creative; let us take healthy initiatives. Let us open our horizons to other forms of 'cultivating and humanizing life'.

May the Spirit of the Lord, who made the Blessed Virgin Mary fruitful, help and guide us in every good work. Amen.

## Appendix I

### THE HOUSE REPORTS AND THEIR TREATMENT AT THE MGM

#### *New version, taking into account the decisions of the Central Commissions 2004*

*When drawing up its Report at the request of the General Chapter, the community:*

- 1) *Tries to show the General Chapter the real state of its life at that moment.*

*It therefore:*

- 2) *Reflects on its life.*
  - a) *Real participation in the writing of the Report creates unity.*
  - b) *It can also help a community become aware of a particular need it may have for support or encouragement from the Chapter.*
- 3) *Helps the General Chapter achieve a view of the whole Order in the present circumstances, so that it can:*
  - a) *discern the working of the Spirit, and*
  - b) *deal with problem areas.*
- 4) *Shares its own experience with the other communities of the Order.*
- 5) *Opens itself to a prophetic or pastoral word from the Chapter through:*
  - a) *the mixed Commission which studies its Report, and/or*
  - b) *the synthesis drawn up by the Chapter.*
- 6) *Increases healthy communication and dialogue between local communities and the General Chapter.*

#### **A. Writing the House Reports**

There is no main theme for the MGM of 2005. However, to help the communities in drawing up their house reports the Central Commissions wish to propose the following questions:

- a) What has been the evolution of the community over the course of the last three Regular Visitations?
- b) What have been the greatest gifts and challenges throughout this evolution, and how did you face them?
- c) How would you describe the present situation of the community?
- d) Are there special items, which you wish to share with the other communities of the Order?

In writing this report it is important to remain grounded in the concrete lived experience of the community and avoid more abstract reflections. A community is always free to use its Visitation Card as the basis for its house report. The report will be drawn up by the community and its Superior in consultation with the Father Immediate.

The length of the report should not exceed one page (A4 or 8.5x11).

## **B. Reading of the House Reports**

### **1. Preliminary stage:**

1.1 A note will be written by the Coordinating Commission describing the role of the president, the vice-president and the secretary of the Commissions, offering some suggestions.

After the election of the presidents, vice-presidents and secretaries at the beginning of the Chapter, they will have a meeting with a member of the Coordinating Commission or an expert in order to receive some indications on how to fulfil their tasks. If desired, this expert could be available during the Chapter to assist the Commissions in their work.

1.2 As they read the reports, the Commissions will be sensitive to the following points:

- The Superior's pastoral care of the community. For example, care of the aged and infirm members; care of those in formation.
- The available means used by the superior to assure his or her inner balance.
- How the community is facing certain challenges, such as ageing, increasing labour-demands, decreasing numbers, economic stability, etc.
- In cases where an abbot has a large filiation, how he deals with this.

### **2. Reading the Reports in Commission**

2.1 The Mixed Commissions have, by delegation, the authority of the General Chapters, when they study the house reports, in order to suggest or decide what should be done pastorally, and to require the putting into effect of their decisions, except when there is question of rights reserved to the General Chapters [cf. C 79].

2.2 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 Mixed Commission that is reading the report of his daughter house, is consulted (which does not necessarily imply that he participate in the discussions). If more information is needed, the Commission contacts other members of the MGM 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.

2.3 If the procedure to acquire necessary information becomes too time-consuming, the Commission can establish a sub-group from among its own members

to continue the work. The results will be brought back to the Commission. The Commission will offer encouragement and, if necessary, suggestions to the Superior and/or the Father Immediate. A message could be sent to the community after informing the local superior.

The Commission can also require the putting into effect of its decisions.

2.4 Before being presented to the parties concerned, the suggestions made by a Mixed Commission should be accepted by a majority vote of its members.

If not in agreement with the decision of a Mixed Commission, those concerned may have recourse to the plenary assembly, which will decide the procedure to be followed.

2.5 There may be situations that need further pastoral care due to the fact that:

- suggestions and advice of the Mixed Commission are not accepted by the persons involved,
- more time and special interventions are needed in complicated situations.

In such cases the Mixed Commission will draw up a report and inform the Commission responsible for coordinating the transmission of information (cf. n° 2.7).

Then, with the suggestions of the Abbot General, the situation will be referred for deeper study to an ad hoc commission named by the Mixed Commission.

Such an *ad hoc* commission will include a member of the Council of the Abbot General and a Superior of the Region of the monastery being studied.

The *ad hoc* commission brings its findings to the Mixed Commission, which will then propose the recommendations needed to help the community.

2.6 The secretaries of the Mixed Commissions will report regularly to the Coordinating Commission, giving a progress report on their work on the house reports.

2.7 A commission of three members, appointed by the Central Commissions, will coordinate the transmission of information between the mixed commissions, the Abbot General, the Coordinating Commission and, if necessary, the plenary assembly.

### **3. Report to the Plenary Assembly**

Each Mixed 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 Plenary Assembly.

After all the general reports of the Mixed Commissions are heard, with some time after each Report for clarifications, the Reports will be confided to someone or to an *ad hoc* commission, so that a situation of the Order (state of the Order) can be formulated based on these reports. Any issues or trends that would be of interest or concern to the MGM will be highlighted.

The Coordinating Commission can decide how to treat these issues and trends, for example, through the use of panels, discussions in the aula, etc.

The MGM will also invite the Regions and communities to continue reflection on these issues or trends.



**Concerning Truth, Transparency and Confidentiality**

- 1- All those present at the Chapter are bound to confidentiality outside the Chapter concerning sensitive issues.
- 2- All members of the Chapter who take part in decisions have the right to know everything which is needed for a balanced judgement, but also the obligation to respect all the persons and communities involved.
- 3- The Abbot General, the Coordinating Commission and all the structures of service of the Chapter have the duty to give the information with openness and truth, so that the Chapter may function in truth and charity.
- 4- There might be some situations that are not publicly known, some elements of which have to remain secret so as not to damage unnecessarily the reputation of a person or community, provided that the reputation of third parties is not damaged.

\* \* \* \* \*

## Appendix II

### **Superiors *ad nutum***

The following is the text of the paper given by Dom Timothy, Procurator General, on Superiors *ad nutum* (see 2.3.1 above).

#### TOWARDS A STUDY ON THE “SUPERIOR AD NUTUM”

At the 2002 MGM, vote 101 of the Monks Chapter says that the legislation on the “Superior *ad nutum*” will be reviewed at the next General Chapter. The vote was 80 – 17. A consultative vote of the Nuns’ Chapter voted on the same proposition, 65 – 5. Those votes are in the context of the voting on the limitation of the power of the Superior *ad nutum*. This seems to suggest some uneasiness with the change introduced and that the basic principle of law is to be respected, that is, that law follows life. Thus the new legislation will be visited after some lived experience. It would seem that it is for this Central Commission to determine how the topic will be processed. In the English minutes the work on the Superior *ad nutum* question takes eighteen pages. The topic on “Precarity” takes a little more, twenty-one. That does represent a lot of time on the question and may indicate some difficulty in understanding its ramifications.

In Dom Vincent Hermans’ canonical commentary on the Constitutions, the Superior *ad nutum* was seen as a temporary situation. Its most frequent use was related to aiding the Community to be in a better position to elect an abbot. If the condition remained until the General Chapter there was reason to have the situation revisited by the General Chapter. The *ad nutum* situation seemed to indicate a difficulty in the life of the Community and so there may be a need for the pastoral intervention of the Chapter. In recent years, there does seem to have been something of an error in the popular understanding of the situation. Frequently the Superior *ad nutum* was mentioned as having a three year term. It would seem that the rationale for the office was a practical necessity. That necessity was to prepare the Community for an election. But it has evolved into something else. The basic right and one may say duty of a Community in our tradition is to elect its Superior.

The election of the Superior seems fundamental in the Rule of Benedict, with the very interesting check and balance; the local Ordinary and the local Christian Community. If the monks conspire to elect someone who will not challenge their unconverted ways and the local Christians are aware of this they are to bring it to the Bishop. This whole concept of electing raises the fun question about where does the authority come from. Is it the Community in the act of electing that gives the Abbot his authority? Does the Father Immediate have the authority in a closet and he gives out a little bit at a time to the local superior of a foundation? Such thinking gets one into the un-evangelical concept of jurisdiction. This brings us into all kinds of issues that stop most creative thinking .about non-ordained superiors and Abbess Generals!

The question of the Superior *ad nutum* seemed to be raised by the question of prolonging the time in the service of Superior *ad nutum* beyond three years or beyond a General Chapter that studies the particular situation. It is not that clear that the appointment was ever meant to be for three years. It is always *ad nutum* and the three years seems to be a time frame rising from the fact that the General Chapter is to review the situation if it continues. This was a valid concern since there was always a possibility of a Father Immediate wanting to deny the Community the right of election for reasons that can be left to one's own imagination. I have not checked with those involved but it seems that it is this question of prolonging "the term" that brought the topic to the notice of the Congregation and their interpretation that the whole figure of a Superior *ad nutum* in our law was contrary to the Code. In the thinking of the Congregation to have an autonomous Community denied its right to have a "major superior" was against the law.

In some sense, the figure of the Superior *ad nutum* was respecting the Community's right to have a major superior and underlining the importance of that right. Without the elected Superior, the appointed Superior was somewhat limited in his exercise of authority by the Father Immediate in an effort to encourage the Community to grow into the possibility of electing an abbot. The fact that the number of Superiors *ad nutum* has increased may indicate another difficulty such as "precarity". There may be another question to be considered.

Perhaps to assist our having a focus on the topic, a living example can be considered. I asked Dom Ivo if the situation of Orval could be mentioned. He agreed and hopefully will make the facts more explicit and exact.

After the resignation of Dom Matthieu for reasons of health, the Community asked to have a Superior "*ad nutum*". Dom Jean was appointed using the usual process of the permission to have a Superior *ad nutum* the consultation of the Community and the appointment. Dom Jean is not ordained.

Dom Jean asked not to exercise the Father Immediate's care over any of Orval's daughter houses so that there was no necessity for the awkward process of determining to limit the exercise of Dom Jean's "right" to be Father Immediate. The process, you may recall, demands the consent of the Abbot General and his Council, the consultation of the Community and the consultation of the filiations.

But then it was left to the Father Immediate to find Abbots to exercise the ministry of Father Immediate for the two communities of nuns. Is the Father Immediate of Orval in his search for delegate Father Immediates bound to the same process of permissions and consultations as he would have been in limiting Dom Jean's exercise of his "Father Immediate role"?

Another scenario to push our thinking: what if Dom Jean was willing to exercise the paternity and did so with all the proper permissions and consultations? He is a non-priest. Can he exercise jurisdiction in by appointing confessors for the Nuns? (This question was raised at the Chapter.) What if Dom Jean had reason to appoint a Superior *ad nutum* in one of the communities observing all the proper form. Then Dom Jean lost the “*ad nutum*” of his Father Immediate and was no longer Superior. Does the person appointed by Dom Jean still have authority? It was dependent on Dom Jean’s “*ad nutum*” and Dom Jean no longer has that authority. In canonical terms, does the appointment “*ad nutum*” give one a right to the “office” of Superior?

It seems that there has been a move to make canonical a ministry which for real reasons was meant to be temporary and orientated to one task. It is no longer a simple method to assist a community to prepare for an election. In another example, a Father Immediate should have appointed a Superior *ad nutum*, but for good reasons, he did not want to go through the process. Instead he appointed a monk “Claustrial Prior” to fulfill the office of Superior for a short time.

It seems that we now have three ways of being a major superior in our Order.

- 1) A person elected for an indefinite term.
- 2) A person elected for a definite term
- 3) A person named by another person for a period determined by the person who named him to the office, with the Community only having a consultative voice in the process.

We have the tradition of the members of a Community renewing their vow of obedience into the newly elected superior’s hands. We are aware of the medieval connotation of that ritual but nevertheless it is something we have continued to do. With the Superior “*ad nutum*” this is not done. Is this subtlety affecting our understanding of obedience?

One also gets the impression that there is a desire to try the person as superior before electing the person. There is the all too true wisdom that one never really knows what a person will be like as a superior until he has the office. Appointing the person “*ad nutum*” gives this opportunity. This can be understood in the context of someone from another community being chosen but as an ordinary way of choosing a superior, it is against a tradition.

It seems that the question of the Superior *ad nutum* is related to the question of finding suitable candidates to be superior. This in turn seems to be related to the question of precarious communities.

In Dom David Knowles four volume study of English monasticism from the Normans until Henry VIII’s dissolution of the monasteries, he says that the first round of destroying monasteries really did a great service to monasticism. His reason being that there were too many monasteries and that no organization can produce sufficient persons of the quality to be superior for so many houses. Perhaps that could be a part of our question in reflecting on the office of superior in our communities.