

REPORT SUMMARY

REGIONAL MEETING of OCSO

DUTCH-SPEAKING REGION

Abbey of Our Lady of Koningsoord

Arnhem

24-26 April 2017

ATTENDANCE

Superiors

M. Julian	Arnhem
M. Rebekka	Bocholt
M. Beatrijs	Brecht
D. Alberic	Schiermonnikoog
D. Malachias	Echt
D. Bernardus	Tilburg
D. Nathanaël	Westmalle
D. Manu	Westvleteren

Delegates

Sister Pascale
Sister Tamar
Sister Lutgardis
Brother Jelke

Brother Wigbert

Brother Stefaan

Absent with apologies

D. Daniël	Zundert	Brother Christiaan
D. Clemens	Bornholm	

Invitees

D. Timothy	Rome - Member of the Council of the Abbot General
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Secretary

Sister Margareth	Arnhem
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1. Opening

Dom Bernardus opened the meeting with a prayer of Monsignor de Korte, Bishop of the Diocese of s-Hertogenbosch. He warmly welcomed the attendees, particularly Dom Timothy. There was no representation present from Zundert or Bornholm. A card will be sent to Brother Daniël and the brothers at Zundert as a gesture of affection.

2. Minutes of last year's Regional Meeting, Zundert 2016

The minutes were read through; there were no remarks arising. The minutes were then confirmed and Sister Margareth was thanked.

3. The House Reports

The house reports drawn up for the forthcoming General Chapter 2017 were read by the relevant superior or a delegate and then an opportunity was given to ask questions. Good use was made of this opportunity, with evidence of great interest, connectedness and involvement with the communities.

4. Drafting of the Regional Report for General Chapter 2017

In advance of the meeting, the Superiors had provided answers to three questions regarding the Regional Report; these answers were read out and briefly discussed. All Houses had given due and serious consideration to the questions, and there had been a lot of good joint work on the answers. In answering the questions, most Houses had based themselves on the situation in their own community; a few had considered the situation in the Region. Despite this, it was clear from the answers that there was a great measure of unity as regards experience within the Houses. This exercise was found to be a fruitful one.

Dom Malachias (Echt) and Sister Tamar (Klaarland) had been appointed to write a preview text; this text was discussed and amended on a few minor points and was then unanimously accepted.

REGIONAL REPORT FOR GENERAL CHAPTER 2017

Question 1: Fruits since Vatican II and drawbacks

Our Region has been richly blessed by the fruits which have been given to us by the developments of the last fifty years. The chief of these are: the community has grown closer due to the unification of choir monks/nuns and lay brothers/sisters; we have gained a clearer focus on the contemplative life, partly due to the less central role of observations and a better recognition of the hazards of legalism; *lectio divina* and life from the monastic source-texts, having become increasingly accessible, have been rediscovered in their nourishing power; concomitantly with the increased attention being paid to the inner life of each of us individually, we have had more and more openness to real human life and living together; our involvement in and openness to society has been boosted, as reflected by the increased importance that our guesthouses are now assuming and in the thought we are giving to lived ecumenism and inter-faith dialogue. A strong contributing factor to all these has been the switch to holding the liturgy in our native languages. Because the introduction of the vernacular in our Region was undertaken jointly between the OSB and the OCist., a close working relationship has arisen in other monastic domains besides, and our Region highly values this.

A few of the drawbacks of these developments are the following. Following the loss of earlier 'certainty' and the firmer exercise of authority in the past on the one hand and the enhanced emphasis on everyone having responsibilities on the other hand, the right balance has not always been struck. Silence and seclusion from the world appear to be coming under threat.

Moreover, we would be wary of regarding Vatican II as the great turning-point, as the question would seem to suggest. We have an abiding need to return always *ad fontes*, simultaneously both being open to the kairos of our day and guarding ourselves against the menaces of our time, in order that we can pass on our monastic life into the future.

Question 2: Our prophetic task and efforts for modern-day evangelism

Cistercian abbeys are not islands unto themselves unaffected by the secularist and individualistic zeitgeist. It is vital that we acknowledge this and that we seek to open up in the evangelical spirit.

Our way of life is already prophetic as it is: our living gratuitously, our being free for God without having to 'achieve' anything — we show what it means to seek God, to place Him at the centre and to live from His mercy. Through our communal life, in our givenness to each other, but also in all our vulnerability, we give out a strong witness that runs contrary to the individualistic spirit of the age. Our attention to beauty and the environment shows our esteem for creation and the Creator.

We engage in evangelism in our own way, by receiving guests and having them share in the liturgy. Some communities have a Group of Friends of the Cistercians; a few Houses even expressly provide formation to those interested. Our giving of testimonies, whether within the House or outside it, is also part of our evangelism.

Question 3: The four pillars — Opus Dei, personal prayer, lectio and work — and their impact on monastic life

There is emphasis upon each of these four pillars in each of our communities, but the quest for equilibrium between them is an ongoing challenge for most communities. Where the four pillars are out of balance, this inevitably brings with it tensions in the community and between the generations.

In our Region, the liturgy in the communities is generally well attended-to.

The element of work is tending to weigh more heavily in some communities, of necessity to earn our daily bread. Where this is so, it calls for caution that prayer and lectio are not squeezed out. In others of our communities, there is a risk that the link between work and income will be lost from view and that the work pillar defaults to 'keeping busy'.

5. Brief report by Dom Bernardus on the Central Commission 2016 at Roscrea

Dom Bernardus had sent the Superiors a report on the Central Commission on 20 June last year, directly after the meeting. This report, and the official minutes from the Central Commission, were briefly reconsidered at this point.

6. Review of votes 47-50 from General Chapter 2014 and the regional procedure

M. Rebekka led us in considering the two topics which are on the agenda for the General Chapter under the ordinary procedure. Following extensive discussion, it was resolved to go through the Law Commission's proposed votes by way of an opinion poll. It was evident that our Region is keen to maintain the age limit at 75.

7. Amendment of C. 67 and assisting a community as it becomes more vulnerable

Dom Alberic led us in considering two topics which are on the agenda for the General Chapter under the extraordinary procedure. In this discussion, the quality of both of the working documents was praised. Dom Alberic's introduction helped us to have good sight of

all the players involved in the 'play' of a community in a fragile situation. What was important was to look first at how Houses could assist each other, rather than proceeding straight away to suppress a fragile House. For this reason, the attendees argued that the scope for making fragile Houses dependent on another House, whether for the purposes of closing them down permanently or of reinvigorating them, should be looked into more deeply. As things currently stand, a House can only be made dependent (known as annex house) if the process of suppressing it is initiated first afterwards an annex house can then be set up. It should be possible, the meeting heard, to make a House dependent on another (whether permanently or temporarily) without having to suppress it first.

8. Fathers Immediate

Dom Malachias led us in considering the issue of the Fathers Immediate which is on the agenda for the General Chapter under the extraordinary procedure. In the discussion, the working document was highly valued, especially for its emphasis on the spiritual aspect of the Father Immediate's role. The current situation is found to be highly complex, and there are no easy answers. There is some apprehension at the term 'family of filiations'. The proposal about Mothers Immediate, or about making more use of abbesses in general, was found entirely feasible. The idea of having a visitor for a given region was rejected, as a visitor is not the same as having a Father Immediate. The question was asked whether members of the Council of the Abbot General could not become a Father Immediate, or a Delegated Father Immediate. The attendees could not perceive any real solutions, but found this discussion an excellent preparation for General Chapter.

9. Candidates for membership of the Council of the Abbot General

M. Rebekka led us in a discussion of the candidates for membership of the Council of the Abbot General and the associated problem of whether Superiors at the General Chapter may revoke the nominations of members of their communities. The discussion saw a repetition of the earlier-mentioned importance of having suitable candidates and of not being primarily concerned about their languages or country of origin.

10. Sexual abuse prevention

Dom Manu and Sister Pascale reported on their work to set up Regional guidelines for **sexual abuse prevention**, as they had been requested to do at the 2016 Regional Meeting. The meeting accepted their documents. It is up to each House to adapt these guidelines to its own situation. The guidelines are required to be stored in a folder and be placed such that anyone can view them. It was urged that everyone make it their business to adopt these guidelines thoroughly and also include information on this issue in their guesthouse information booklets.

11. Regional Secretary for Formation

Sister Benedict (Arnhem) reported on her duties as **Regional Secretary for Formation**. The shared formation sessions with the Benedictines are going well; currently 25 brethren and

sisters (OSB and OCSO) are taking part in them. Sister Benedict also proposed a few new initiatives. The Superiors emphasised the importance of a session currently being planned regarding unacceptable behaviour, in the broadest sense of the term. Sister Benedict will work on this.

12. VOTES AT THE 2017 DUTCH REGIONAL MEETING

To sound out opinions in the Region regarding reviewing votes 47-50 of General Chapter 2014, we held an opinion poll on the proposed votes arising from the Law Committee's working document.

Vote 1 (option A)

St 39.3.A bis: A monk or nun having attained 75 years of age can neither be elected nor postulated

We approve Statute 39.3.A bis.

YES 11 – NO 0 -- ABS 1 ACCEPTED

If this vote is accepted we do not take vote 2-4

Vote 2 (option B)

ST 39.3.A is completed leaving the possibility of the postulation of a candidate over 75 years of age:

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

We approve the completed Statute 39.3.A

YES – NO -- ABS

If this vote is accepted, we take vote 3

Vote 3 (limitation of option B)

The following Statute is added to C.40

ST 40.A bis The abbot/abbess having been postulated at an age beyond 75 and whose postulation has been confirmed shall spontaneously offer his/her resignation at the next General Chapter.

We approve Statute 40.A bis.

YES – NO – ABS

If this vote is accepted, we do not take vote 4.

Vote 4 (limitation of Option B)

ST 40.A bis: The candidate having been postulated at an age beyond 75 and whose postulation has been confirmed, serves a three-year term.

We approve Statute 40.A bis.

YES – NO – ABS

Vote 5 (related question)

A new ST 40.A ter (or 40.A.bis, if the result of vote 3 was negative) is added, introducing into the Constitutions what has been up to now the general practice.

ST 40.A ter (or 40.A bis). The abbot/abbess whose resignation at age 75 had not been accepted will present it again at the next General Chapter.

We approve the new Statute 40.A ter (or 40.A bis).

YES 11 – NO 0 – ABS 1 ACCEPTED

VOTE 6 arising from the desirability of being able to make Houses dependent

We require that the possibility be investigated of making a House dependent (temporarily or permanently) on another House without first having to initiate its suppression.

YES 12 NO 0 ABS 0 ACCEPTED

VOTE 7 arising from the Regional Report

We endorse the draft text of the Regional Report.

YES 12 NO 0 ABS 0 ACCEPTED

13. Minor points

13.1 The Superiors Pastoral meeting

This pastoral meeting went very well and was felt to be an enrichment.

13.2 Abbot General's travel reports

Dom Bernardus reported that translations of these into Dutch had been discontinued because it was a very time-consuming business and the contents were not always felt to be highly relevant. The letters will continue to be available on the Order's website in our three official languages.

13.3 Publication of a new translation of the Constitutions and Statutes

Given the still-open matters around the Constitutions and Statutes, it has not yet been decided to publish them definitively in print.

However, an electronic version is available for all Houses and will be disseminated.

Pending the publication, each House can provide its own copied publication.

This temporary solution was accepted.

14. Close of meeting

Dom Bernardus thanked the meeting participants for their efforts, involvement and patience. He remarked that the meeting had certainly been affected by the situation in the community of Zundert and the death of Sister Ruth of Klarland, which had obliged M. Rebecca and Sr. Tamar to go home early. Dom Bernardus closed the meeting after thanking M. Julian and the Arnhem community for their kind hospitality.

Next year's meeting is to be held at the Abbey of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart in Westmalle from 9-12 April 2018.