



CÎTEAUX YESTERDAY, TODAY AND TOMORROW

*Principles and Suggestions for a creative
fidelity—innovation in Continuity*



Some General Statistics—as of January 2021

160 Houses (Monks 90, Nuns 70)

36 Houses with 10 or less members

50 Monasteries with no one in formation

Absent Members accounting for 15% of the monks and 2-3% of the nuns

24 Houses with Superiors *ad nutum*

5 Houses with Apostolic Commissaries

26 Houses whose superiors are either 75 this year or will be in 2022

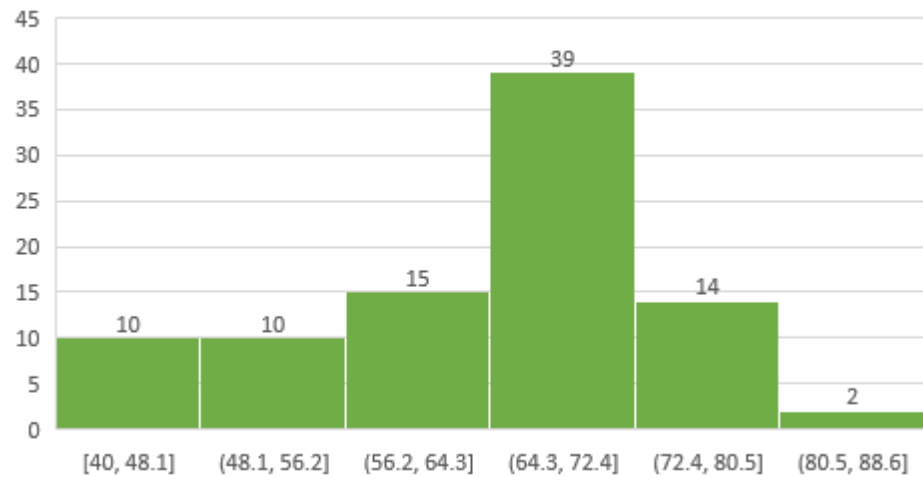
20 Houses suppressed or dispersed in recent decades

Average ages: 58 Houses \geq 70 (M. 31 & N. 27)

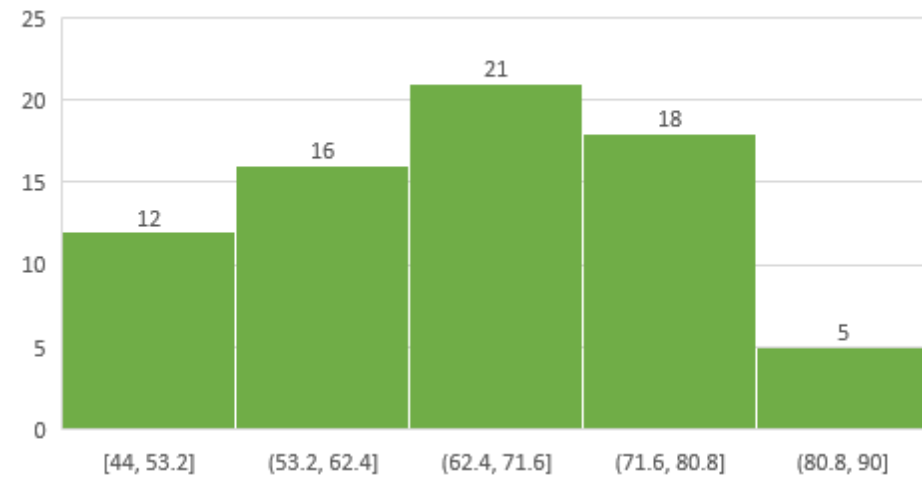
Average ages: Of these 58 Houses, 8 are \geq 80 (M. 2 & N. 6)

Average Age Categories

MONKS' HOUSES



NUNS' HOUSES



A Sampling of Challenges Arising from the Situations these Statistics Reflect:

- ❖ Small communities (that are not recent foundations) struggle to maintain a healthy and balanced monastic life/horarium, with certain members required to assume multiple roles that generate stress and overwork.
- ❖ Smaller communities (and an overall smaller order) result in the potential leadership pool also becoming smaller and thus the task of finding capable superiors is rendered ever more difficult—the present number of Superiors *ad nutum* seems to illustrate this reality.
- ❖ In aging communities (where most are aged) adaptations to the limitations of the seniors can sometimes take priority, and negatively impact the life of the younger members in areas like the liturgy, work, community life, and ongoing formation.
- ❖ Communities experiencing extended periods with no one in formation, risk losing flexibility, and entrenched interpersonal dynamics can make it more difficult to welcome, accommodate, and integrate new members—when these apply for entry.
- ❖ Despite the presence of faith and fidelity to monastic *conversatio*, all of the above can lower morale—especially in houses that are fragile and whose future is thus uncertain and precarious. Accordingly, it becomes a real challenge to live daily monastic life generously, authentically, and not in survival-mode with its attendant stress.

- ❖ The unique challenge that superiors in fragile/precarious communities experience in engendering hope and an enlivening spirit.
- ❖ The toll upon superiors required to initiate the painful, complex, and emotionally-charged process of deciding whether to begin the process of the suppression of her/his community.
- ❖ Houses heading towards suppression/closing require significant involvement and time from the Father Immediate—as well as those appointed to the commission involved in the suppression and closing of a monastery.
- ❖ All of the above, result in greater need for the kind of assistance/intervention traditionally offered by the Father Immediate—thus, there is likely to be a greater call made upon Fathers Immediate in the future, not less.
- ❖ Fathers Immediate can also be living in fragile communities and their frequent absences in service of their Daughter Houses can be detrimental to their own communities.

Reading the Signs of the Times: Listening to the Spirit

- ❖ What, if anything, is God (the Holy Spirit) saying through the present crises and challenges facing the Order?
- ❖ If Christ were to address this meeting (or the General Chapter), what might be the essence of his message to us?
- ❖ Is the dearth of vocations in many of our monasteries the consequence of God not calling candidates to these monasteries, or are those called not responding?
- ❖ If the former *is* the case, why might God not be calling new members to some of our communities?
- ❖ As we know certain Orders and Religious Institutes were founded to serve/fulfill a specific purpose (e.g., education, orphanages) and because they have served their purpose, they gradually disappear. Although it seems unlikely that monasticism is an instance of this phenomenon, might the Cistercian Charism have run its course and might it need to gradually fade into history as newer expressions of the monastic charism take its place?

Reading the Signs of the Times: Listening to the Spirit

- ❖ Or, are we being challenged to reinterpret the Cistercian Charism to meet the unique challenges of our time?
- ❖ Have so many of our communities become so caught up with survival as to neglect this ongoing/continuous task of reinterpretation?
- ❖ What lies at the heart of our present crises and challenges: Is it a lack of authentic fidelity to the Cistercian Charism?
- ❖ Is it a question of observances and general failures in spiritual discipline?
- ❖ Have some of our communities succumbed to what might be termed a “communal *acedia*” that has paralyzed vitality and growth and that then further reinforces the *acedia*?
- ❖ Is it that true spiritual leaders able to inspire/attract candidates to a life that demands much but also promises much, are a relative rarity?

Reading the Signs of the Times: Listening to the Spirit

- ❖ Is it the quality of community life and the nature of interpersonal relationships within our communities?
- ❖ Is it the loss of a true contemplative orientation and the erosion of the supportive role that values like simplicity, austerity, silence, and a healthy/authentic “separation from the world” etc.?
- ❖ Would looking at some of the above in relation to communities that are more stable (and even growing) be helpful in evaluating whether these factors are playing a part in our present situation?

Possible Responses to Our Present Challenges:

- ❖ General Chapter: change the frequency—e.g., every five years rather than every three.
- ❖ For the 2022 Chapter, adjust agenda (even eliminate certain items) to accommodate significantly more pastoral/practical concerns and issues—Fathers Immediate, Superiors *ad nutum*, fragile communities, etc.
- ❖ Does the next General Chapter need to stop and evaluate the present situation of the Order across the world and acknowledge that we are at a critical juncture and, perhaps, a significant “tipping point?” And so, for example, how many houses of the order are likely to survive beyond the next five/ten years. What provisions should we be setting in place to deal effectively and humanely as this situation unfolds?
- ❖ For the issue of Fathers Immediate, implement a fairer distribution of houses even if issues relating to paternity/filiation are compromised.
- ❖ Limit the number of Daughter Houses—Law Commission discussion suggested 4, but this was not accepted.
- ❖ Abbesses Immediate for the nuns’ houses could be seriously reconsidered.

- ❖ Greater use of delegated visitors so as to ease pressure on some Fathers Immediate.
- ❖ Lengthen the time-period between visitations for houses that are fundamentally sound and not in any urgent need of assistance.
- ❖ Geographical and language considerations—travel and language can be unnecessary stressors on a Father Immediate.
- ❖ Regional self-help—including visitations across filiations.
- ❖ Individual communities initiating self-help and seeking local resources in dealing with problems and communal discernment.
- ❖ Explore the relatively rare phenomenon of houses in the developed/Western world that are *not* fragile but stable and even growing. Is there anything the rest of the order can learn from them, or are they simply anomalies?
- ❖ Do we need to revisit “**amalgamations**” of communities or define more specific criteria for establishing the non-viability of a community?