

Regional Meeting of the Isles  
via Zoom

Tuesday, 7<sup>th</sup> September 2021

Participants:

Mt Melleray	Dom Richard Purcell
Whitland	absent
Mount St Bernard	Dom Joseph Delargy
Roscrea	Dom Malachy Thompson
Caldey	Dom Daniel Van Santvoort
Glencairn	M. Marie Fahy
Mellifont	Dom Brendan Freeman
Nunraw	Dom Mark Caira
Bethlehem	Dom Celsus Kelly
Bolton	Dom Michael Ryan
Tautra	M. Brigitte Pinot

Invited:

Sr Elizabeth Mary, Hynning  
Sr Maria, Brownshill  
Fr Joel, Munkeby

Agenda: Points received from the communities of the Region:

1. Diminishing communities
2. Filiation in the Order
3. Web design, and social media
4. Formation and Zoom
5. Communities of monks without a priest
6. Order's response to climate change
7. Election of the Abbot General
8. Arrangements for the next General Chapter
9. Declaration of Principle on Safeguarding Against All Forms of Abuse

The meeting opened with a prayer and was chaired by Dom Richard who introduced the topics for discussion. (Dom Brendan and Dom Joseph were unable to attend the morning session and M. Christine was unable to attend the meeting).

1. Diminishing communities: Tautra is willing to welcome other Sisters from other communities that are preparing to close. The sister (s) would need to speak English and a little Norwegian. Maybe for a Sabbatical year or a break also. Tautra now have the space and it is a proactive stance as a community. We need to listen to words of wisdom from the Houses that have actually closed. Dom Brendan has an article in CSQ: 'Closing a Monastic Community.' Learn practical wisdom from the experience of closure. This topic is already on Agenda of CC 2019, Vote 53. We support Vote 53 of last Central Commission.
2. Web design, and social media: each community seems to be doing what they can in this area. This suggestion is for the Order, not just the Region. Fr Jan (Caldey) has a lot of experience in this area. Social Media has to be maintained, share experience. Web design needs to be professional. Centralising it would be very difficult. Personalised to the local house but we can give and receive advice. Social media can be managed by the house itself. Order does not have face on Social Media. Maybe we need to look at our policy on social media? Guidelines on use of technology in our Region need to be updated.
3. Formation and Zoom: Monastic formation can be supported now on line. We could invite OSB and O.Cist. teachers/lecturers. Juniors feel isolated, need to meet peers in monastic life. On line has the advantage of no travelling necessary, easy to communicate. US Regional meeting: courses via Internet. Need for formation via Zoom. Tautra: half of community will attend a Zoom formation from O.Cist on prayer. Good programmes like Armand Jean de Rance on YouTube. Novitiate now empty in Tautra. Mt Melleray have been doing Scripture via Zoom with Sr Eleanor, Glencairn. Sr Eleanor willing to teach via Zoom. Sr Sarah could be asked to give information on different courses available on Internet. We could ask Sr Sarah to organise a Juniors Course or at least a meeting via Zoom in November? Would we like to progress this in the Region? Ask Sr Sarah to facilitate a meeting of those in formation. How do we form newcomers? It is important and basic to formation that the community be formative. There is no substitute for community formation. It is good for juniors to meet. Link with US Region for formation and sharing? Study course could be good from US but sharing might be best in the Region.
4. Communities of monks without a priest: See Sr Eleanor's paper attached. Her paper was very helpful and well received. She covers the topic very well. Her response will be in the Minutes of our meeting so that it is shared with other Regions. Non-priest Abbots? Presumed that there will be priests in a community, but if no priests in a community then it would be like a

nun's community. Myrendal have no priests, just a major priory. Research the possibilities in Canon Law, the problem is clerical authority. Very creative what Sr Eleanor has written. Puts it out there for people to reflect on. Leadership and wisdom can be non-clerical!

5. Order's response to climate change: This was discussed at the last Regional Meeting in Roscrea and maybe we need to be reminded again. General Chapter is probably not the place to deal with this topic, so many varied environments, best to deal with it at a local level. Could be a contentious issue and so would dominate the GC. See Votes 39-41 of Central Commission 2019, Citeaux.
6. Arrangements for the next General Chapter:
  - Lauds and Mass satisfactory. Distribution of Holy Communion is still a bit problematic but has improved.
  - Good to have Lauds and Mass as whole Chapter
  - Vespers in linguistic groups
  - Covid protocol; testing? National directives, Italy will determine. Risky matter, can change rapidly.

Afternoon session:

7. We will ask the Abbot General and Council to arrange a risk assessment as to the safety of persons attending GC in 2022. It would be good to have some form of Covid testing and insist on protocol.
8. Could we look at the possibility of having Vespers in private? The GC is so intense and tiring and very often we have commission meetings after supper with practically no free time/space throughout the day. We need the possibility of some silence and aloneness. Each person could pray Vespers in private room or in the Basilica or in the Church of the Roses. Maybe Vespers in common could be optional? We could sing the Salve at the end of the afternoon session.
9. Good to have a date be set as to whether the GC will go ahead or not in 2022
10. Election of Abbot General: each superior of the Region will consult their community on the role of Abbot General and submit points for inclusion in the Regional report. Suggestions that came in from the Region to be included. Two or three persons to write this report: Dom Daniel and M. Brigitte chosen. Report will be finalised at the pastoral sharing in May 2022.
11. Filiation: add the name of the Founding house in the Elenchus. The broader question of filiation – no changes made at last GC, all were temporary

delegations. Irish Houses: are we closed in on ourselves? Guadalupe is now Father Immediate of MSB. We ask that the work on the Father Immediate be prepared before the GC.

12.Safeguarding: Dom Richard and Dom Bernardus prepared a document on Abuse. A copy was circulated for discussion. What happens with this document now? Needs to be added to our legislation – Statute on Regular Visitation, Ratio. This gives people a chance to speak more freely at a Visitation and the superior needs to be aware of this. We support the document of Declaration with the view to including this in the Statute of the Regular Visitation.

Votes: Region of the Isles – **Regional Meeting 2021** – 7 Sept 2021

Vote 1 We wish that a date be set by which the decision to proceed with the General Chapter of 2022 be confirmed.

Yes 10 No 0 Abs 0

Vote 2 In the light of COVID-19 we ask that a risk assessment be carried out regarding the safety of those attending the General Chapter and that provision be made for testing.

Yes 10 No 0 Abs 0

Vote 3 Because of the intensity of the General Chapter and in order to create some silent space we wish that Vespers be recited privately.

Yes 6                      No 2                      Abs 2

***Filiation and Fathers Immediate***

Vote 4                      We wish that some preparatory work on the question of Fathers Immediate be done in advance of the General Chapter.

Yes 10                      No 0                      Abs 0

Vote 5                      We suggest that the name of the Founding House of each community be included in the Elenchus.

Yes 10                      No 0                      Abs 0

***Safeguarding Policy***

Vote 6                      We support the initiative of the Central Commission of 2019 on Safeguarding with a view to having the issue included in the Statute on the Regular Visitation.

Yes 10                      No 0                      Abs 0

## For the meeting of Superiors of the Region of the Isles, September 2021

On the agenda is a question from Nunraw about a community of monks without a priest. I propose some thoughts for consideration.

**Q: Can male Cistercian communities formally / legally exist without ordained priests? Can they consist solely of brothers? However C. 18 says that the Eucharist ‘is to be celebrated by the whole community every day’.**

A: Yes, male Cistercian (OCSO) communities can formally / legally exist without ordained priests. They can consist solely of brothers.

- There is no requirement in our Constitutions for male communities to have a priest or priests among its members. There is probably an underlying assumption that there will be priests among the members of the community, but since it is not explicit it cannot be interpreted as a requirement.  
C. 5 which defines the local community refers to the conditions outlined in the *Statute on Foundations* n. 15. The *Statute on Foundations* (which applies equally to monks and nuns) does not include any reference to priests as a condition or determining factor for rank or recognition as a community of the Order.
- C. 67 on the Suppression of a Monastery does not require a male community without priests to be suppressed. Neither the proposed new text of C. 67, nor the proposed new *Statute on the Accompaniment of Fragile Communities*, mention lack of ordained members as a criterion for the existence or suppression of a community.  
The absence of ordained members may indeed be an indication that a community is in decline and a cause for concern, but it is not *per se* a situation which requires the closure of the community.
- There is in fact one community of monks in the Order which consists of brothers only: Myrendal in Denmark. The lack of a priest (for several years now) does not require the closure of the community.

### Daily Eucharist

C. 18 states that the Eucharist “is to be celebrated by the whole community every day.” This Constitution is the same for monks and nuns.

- C. 18 does not say that the celebrant of the Eucharist has to be a member of the community.
- A community of monks without a priest among its members could follow the practice of the nuns’ communities, e.g.
  - have a resident chaplain from a community of the Order, by kindness of that community and its abbot;
  - have priests from other communities of the Order come to stay for shorter periods, from a week up to three months at a time, to assure daily Mass;
  - have a priest, or a rota of priests, from outside come in to celebrate Mass daily;

- offer residence to a retired priest in exchange for chaplaincy services;
- offer a monastic “desert” experience to a priest who needs time and space for a sabbatical or e.g. to write a book, in exchange for chaplaincy services;
- go to the parish or other local church for Mass, at least on Sundays;
  - NB: there is a growing awareness that a Service of Holy Communion without Mass in the absence of a priest is intended for Sundays only. The Dutch bishops do not permit this Service to be used (regularly) on weekdays.
- other solutions as imagination and circumstances suggest!

### **Father Immediate**

According to C. 76, communities of nuns enjoy (i.e. have a right to) the ministry of a monk of the Order who serves as chaplain and confessor. It is for the Father Immediate, having consulted the abbess and the nuns, to propose this monk to the local Ordinary as chaplain and ordinary confessor.

- A priestless community of monks does not automatically have a similar right.
- Nevertheless, the spirit of the Charter of Charity would suggest that other communities be generously disposed towards their priestless brothers (cf. C.71).
- The Father Immediate does not have to (and often, nowadays, cannot) provide a monk from his own community, or even from within the Order, as chaplain. He works with the abbess to find a solution (see the list above). The similarity of circumstances would suggest that his pastoral responsibility to a priestless daughter house of monks would operate on the same principles.

### **Election of a superior**

The one elected as superior in a community of monks must be a priest. “If the brother who is elected is a lay monk or deacon, he should receive the priesthood as soon as possible. The Abbot General is not to confirm the election until he has verified that the one elected is willing to receive the priesthood and has the qualities required by universal law for ordination.” (ST 39.6).

If there is no priest in the community, and no brother willing and able to be ordained, then the community could

- elect someone from another community as their superior; or
- postulate a brother and ask the Holy See for a dispensation from the requirement of ordination. Up to now, the Holy See has not granted such a dispensation to our Order. However, the case of a brothers-only community is interesting.
  - It might be possible to argue that a brother as superior of a community of brothers is the equivalent of a nun being superior of a community of nuns. Since nuns have a nun-abbess, why can the brothers not have a brother-abbot?

- This would particularly be the case in a community which has no daughter-house (the superior would not be a Father Immediate and would not have to exercise the power of governance over daughter houses with clerics).

It might be interesting to try this with the Holy See, but I have no idea what its chances of success would be.

Otherwise,

*If* there is a General Chapter next year;  
and *if* that Chapter deals with the proposed *Statute on Fragile Communities*;  
and *if* the Chapter approves the figure of “Monastic Commissary” outlined there;  
and *if* the Holy See subsequently approves it -  
*then* it might be an option for this situation.

I hope this helps.

*Sr Eleanor, Glencairn*  
*6 September 2021*