

# MEETING of the US REGION

June 16 to June 21, 2022

Villa Maria del Mar  
Santa Cruz, California



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**U.S. REGIONAL MEETING PARTICIPANTS**

**Villa Maria del Mar**

**June 15-20, 2022**

**MONASTERY**

Berryville  
Crozet  
Genesee  
Gethsemani  
Guadalupe  
Holy Spirit  
Mepkin  
Mississippi  
New Melleray  
Redwoods  
Santa Rita  
Snowmass  
Spencer  
Wrentham

**SUPERIOR**

Fr Joseph Wittstock  
M Kathy Ullrich  
Fr Gerard D'Souza  
Fr Elias Dietz  
Fr Peter McCarthy  
Fr Augustine Myslinski  
Fr Joseph Tedesco  
M Rebecca Stramoski  
Fr Brendan Freeman  
M Kathy De Vico  
M Victoria Murray  
Fr Charles Albanese  
Fr Vincent Rogers  
M Sofia Millican

**INVITED GUESTS**

Dom Bernardus Peeters, Abbot General  
Fr Raphaël Garcia-Pelayo, Secretary to Abbot General  
Dom Steele Hartmann of Tarrawarra  
Sr Myra Hill, Mississippi (Delegate to General Chapter)

**SECRETARIES**

Sr Barbara Smickel, Crozet  
Sr Anna O'Meara, Mississippi  
Br Juan Diego Warren, Conyers

*President of the Region: Fr Gerard D'Souza*

*Assistant Moderators: Fr Joseph Wittstock, M Kathy Ullrich*

*Preparation of Regional Report: Secretaries and Delegate*

*Readers for the Minutes: Fr Joseph Wittstock, M Kathy Ullrich*

USA REGIONAL REPORT TO THE GENERAL CHAPTER 2022

	Number of Houses	Members Present	Members in Formation	Average Age
Women	5	87	11	67.4
Men	10	198	26	70.9
Total	15	285	37	69.15

After the good experience of the first part of the General Chapter in February this year, we were grateful to be able to meet again before the September continuation of the Chapter. We were especially appreciative of the presence of the Abbot General and his Secretary which contributed significantly to our discussions. Dom Bernardus’ wisdom, experience and insight deepened our connection with all the other monasteries of the Order and made us even more aware of our solidarity in the many challenges we are all presently facing.

The quiet and beautiful setting of this particular Regional Meeting at a retreat house on the Pacific Ocean also contributed to the depth of our exchanges. We were aware of missing the supportive atmosphere of meeting in a monastery but also appreciated the very positive aspects of ‘going apart for a while.’

We experienced once again the strength and support of the relationships within our Region and the collective wisdom in the group, especially regarding some painful situations being confronted and worked through. We are facing some special challenges together:

- Commissions of the Future in place for three monasteries in the Region and the painful prospect of closure
- Concern for scarcity of vocations in many of our monasteries
- Difficulty in obtaining chaplains for our nuns’ communities

We were encouraged to learn from the Abbot General of some initiatives taken in other Regions which are also facing such challenges. We are also appreciative of new signs of vitality in evidence in many of the monasteries in our own Region.

- Time and serious effort invested in new initiatives for initial and ongoing formation in our houses, with the help of a very active and competent Regional Secretary of Formation
- Active involvement in efforts to respond to concern for the environment, especially as expressed in *Laudato Si*
- During the time of the pandemic, reaching out through almsgiving and a deeper commitment to prayer for those in need
- Greater attention to the quality of life within our communities and the level of communication among our members
- Renovation of older monastic buildings and structures according to present needs
- Recognition of the need of some monasteries to reduce the size of their physical plants which may favor an unhealthy distancing among the members

- A wise use of technology in the service of better communication among our houses, e.g., On-line meetings of the Superiors and vocational initiatives
- Continued efforts to develop leadership skills from within our communities
- Ingenuity in adapting the self-support work of our communities to fluctuating economic conditions

The vitality of the Cistercian life in the communities of our Region gives us a steady hope for the future, deep gratitude for our charism and the gift it is to the Church, and a determination to be open to all the challenges and graces which the present time has for us.

## INTRODUCTION

Having “gone West” in 2022, the superiors of the US Region were immediately at home in the expansive beauty and peaceful environment of Villa Maria del Mar Retreat Center in Santa Cruz, California. We were graciously welcomed not only by our hostesses, the Sisters of the Holy Names of Jesus and Mary, but also by a pod of dolphins plus a whale performing relatively close to shore, and with seals making their appearance later in the meeting.

We were honored to welcome to the meeting our new Abbot General, Dom Bernardus, whose wisdom, vision, and dedication are sources of inspiration and encouragement to us. Our gathering was further enriched by the presence and participation of the Abbot General’s Secretary, Fr Raphaël Garcia-Pelayo, Abbot Steele Hartmann of Tarrawara, and our Regional Delegate, Sr Myra Hill of Mississippi.

Early in the meeting our attention and concern turned to providing care to one of our group who tested positive for Covid, and to taking necessary precautions to prevent spreading the virus among ourselves, as well as to the staff of the retreat center. We were thankful that by the time of departure no one else had fallen ill.

The focus of the meeting was definitely shaped and invigorated by the participation of Dom Bernardus with his desire to know the monks, nuns and communities of the Order in the realities of their present situations. This is the necessary starting point for revitalizing our charism in our times. Consequently, the agenda, discussions, and subsequent Minutes took on a somewhat different shape this time, as is evident in what follows. A deep love of the Cistercian charism as well as the openness, profound respect, and compassionate care of the Superiors was evident throughout the meeting – and made this gathering an exceptional event. The Minutes that follow try to mirror this.

These Minutes in English and summaries in French and Spanish will be posted on the Order’s website. A copy of the English Minutes will also be sent by email to the Generalate and to all our United States monasteries.

## HOUSE REPORTS

That the spirit of the Charter of Charity remains alive and active among us was evident in the reading of the House Reports and in the depth of the collective engagement in the situation of each community. A truth voiced often during this Regional Meeting is that our charism does not exist in abstraction but only in living monks and nuns. Belief in the importance and possibilities of bringing the Cistercian Charism to our world today, as well as a deep desire to do so, was evident in the House Reports. Doing so means that each community continues to seek quality of life and not merely continued existence in the same place.

In one way or another all our communities face significant issues that challenge a sustained commitment to seeking consistently this quality of life. There is not a community among us that does not deal to some degree with decreasing numbers because of the significant decline in vocations as well as aging and deaths. This reality is evidenced in relation to significant components of monastic life, such as:

- Communities are experiencing a lack of leadership for the immediate future.
- Three (3) communities have a Commission for the Future.
- The size and upkeep of several monasteries are out of proportion to the smaller and aging communities they are becoming.
- Fewer ordinations affect not only the monks, but also results in the lack of chaplains for houses of nuns; two of which go for long periods without Mass and other sacraments.
- The workload in communities is carried by a fewer number of able persons. This in turn impacts the time and energy available for prayer, *lectio*, and other aspects of monastic life.
- A number of communities are making significant adjustments and changes in their industries. The need for these changes is due not only to internal factors but also to the local and world economies.

Dom Bernardus expressed his gratitude for the opportunity of listening to these House Reports and the ensuing conversations as a good way to get the pulse of the Region. On our part we appreciated the integration of wisdom and realism, as well as the challenge, inherent in his observations. In this regard the Abbot General commented that what he most listened for in these reports was indications of the quality of monastic life in a community, such as, the frequency of Chapter talks and ample time for prayer and *lectio*. The singular importance of formation was brought to the forefront both in the House Reports and in Dom Bernardus' comments.

## REPORT OF THE REGIONAL SECRETARY OF FORMATION

Last year's Regional Meeting in August of 2021 noted the evolution of the Junior Seminar with the dynamic tension between two complementary objectives: that of achieving a solid program of intellectual formation on the basis of the Order's *Ratio*, and of confirming the participants' vocation through association with other juniors and the host community. To this end, the Superiors entrusted the Regional Secretary of Formation, Sr Pamela Clinton (Wrentham), with the task of investigating the formation programs in each of the Houses, and researching comparable Junior Seminars of the French, Spanish and Dutch Regions.

Having duly followed these lines of inquiry, Sr Pamela reported to this year's gathering of Superiors a wide range of local resources, programs and capacities. Whereas some houses offer a complete or near-complete intellectual formation on the lines of the *Ratio*, others look toward the Junior Seminar to supplement the local offering academically. In all cases, aids to formation outside the monastery have been enlisted to complement the resources of the houses. These range from attending class at a local seminary to enrollment in online seminars on topics including monastic spirituality, theology, Scripture and human development.

Reporting on the Junior Seminars of the French, Spanish and Dutch Regions, Sr Pamela noted that the two former Regions present a complete, university-accredited curriculum that allows the individual monasteries to entrust the whole of the participants' academic formation to the Region. Their juniors study primarily by distance, allowing them to continue life in their monasteries, with their coming together for several weeks each year to attend a Seminar. As do our American juniors, those attending the French, Spanish and Dutch Seminars report an invaluable experience of confirming their vocation. They typically form bonds that endure as a source of support among themselves and cohesion for the entire Region. Sr Pamela noted that the time given by the Spanish Region to formation was a true gift to the juniors themselves and to the whole Region, helping also to form teachers for the future. Finally, she noted that by contrast to the Europeans, we in America give less time to the areas of theology and Scripture.

Following her presentation, Sr Pamela made recommendations to the Superiors regarding our Junior Seminar. These include:

- Lengthening the Seminar to a full 14 days, to take greater advantage of the sacrifice of travel involved for both instructors and participants.
- Determining a *Rota* naming the host community for each year. Without it, the Secretary of Formation spends much time negotiating the host community anew each year.
- Entrusting the organization of the Seminar to a committee rather than a single Secretary of Formation, the practice of the European Regions.
- Reworking the Seminar curriculum to allow greater complementarity with existing programs in local monasteries. The subject matter would be broadened within the scope of the *Ratio* to allow more flexibility in the choice of teachers.
- Clearer directives from the Superiors regarding objectives, methods and the pool of professors.

Sr Pamela's presentation generated the engaged response of the Superiors. In particular, they recalled a fluctuation of objectives during the decades of the Seminar's existence, due in part to



the desire to implement the juniors' own aspirations for the program. Poles of emphasis include Cistercian teachers vs. breadth by way of teachers from outside the Order; the value of work and contact with the host community vs. focusing on intellectual input from the instructors. The Superiors reached a consensus that while the juniors' aspirations must continue to be considered, the Superiors remain responsible for defining the goals of the Seminar. This will ensure stability and avoid the "accordion" effect of shifting emphases from one Seminar to the next. Moreover, the existence among our houses of varied capacities for fulfilling the objectives of the *Ratio* calls for discernment regarding the Superiors' expectations for the Seminar. Do we want to move toward complete coverage, as in the French and Spanish Regions, or will the Seminar continue to serve a supplementary role according to our current practice and that of the Dutch Region?

Once goals are clarified, form will follow function. Among other features of the Seminar, the length of the program, choice of professors and option for an organizing committee can be determined. To this end, the Superiors asked Sr Pamela to submit an agenda to the Superiors based on her recommendations and the discernments that have emerged.

### **Deliberation on the Report**

Reviewing Sr Pamela's presentation, the Superiors wished to limit their immediate actions to the Junior Seminar. One or another key individual has for a long time assumed primary responsibility for the Seminar. Now is the time for the Region to play a greater role. The Superiors agreed to support Sr Pamela's recommendation to establish a committee to help the Regional Secretary of Formation (RSF) design and organize the Seminar. The committee is to comprise three members, including the RSF and two Junior Directors, preferably to include representatives from both masculine and feminine houses. The committee will draft a general vision for the Seminar and submit it as a proposal to the Superiors. Once a consensus on vision is reached, the committee and Superiors will collaborate to develop the curriculum and a pool of presenters, and set the duration of the Seminar.

After considering a list of nominees, the participants agreed that Fr James of Spencer and Sr Maria of Crozet will be the first to serve on the new committee, together with Sr Pamela as RSF.

Sr Pamela's recommendation to create a *Rota* of host monasteries for the Seminar was well received. Many Superiors voiced their willingness to enter the *Rota*, while advising of particular limitations of space or amenities. The President asked all Superiors willing to participate to submit their names, capacities and limitations to Sr Pamela.

## **OTHER REGIONAL MATTERS**

### **CISTERCIAN STUDIES QUARTERLY**

Fr. Elias reported that CSQ is financially healthy, and there is no need to tax the Region at this time. The two problems currently affecting CSQ are related to the pandemic. The first is difficulty obtaining paper because of the supply chain crisis; this explains why the first issue of 2022 just came out. The possibility of contracting with another printer has been investigated, but would cost twice as much. The second challenge is a lack of submissions which likely has been caused by the restraints on research during the shutdown of the first phase of the pandemic. These problems are transitory, and the future of the publication looks positive.

### **CISTERCIAN PUBLICATIONS**

Because the terms of the members of the CP Board elected in 2019 expire this year, the Regional Superiors elected a new Board, as follows: Fr Elias Dietz (President), Fr Gerard D'Souza (Treasurer), M Kathy Ullrich, M Sofia Millican, Marsha Dutton (Executive Editor), Christopher Bellito (representing the publishing field) and Tyler Sergent (scholar). M Kathy and M Sofia are replacing Fr Brendan Freeman and Fr Lawrence Morey; otherwise, the composition of the Board remains as elected in 2019. One additional item of business was the approval of a \$10,000 annual salary increase for Marsha Dutton, Executive Editor, whose dedication and hard work is such a gift to our Region.

### **MONASTIC BUSINESS ASSOCIATION**

The adoption of a certification mark for protection of regional products and services has been under consideration for several years. At the August 2021 meeting of the MBA Board, approval was given to the adoption of a certification mark for regional products and services. The certification mark does not replace trademarks that already exist, but adds a second level of legal protection and serves as a guard of the integrity of products or services. The certification mark on a product indicates that it meets certain criteria. In this way it could also benefit marketing, in that it testifies to a high level of quality. It is the responsibility of the MBA to develop clear criteria for such a mark. Because of the potential benefit to all communities in the region, it is suggested that the cost be proportioned among all our communities, according to our usual regional percentages.

### **REGIONAL MEETINGS PLACE/DATE**

For the next few meetings, we will try the following:

- For larger meetings with delegates in General Chapter years, we will have the Regional Meeting at one of our monasteries.
- For the meetings in non-Chapter years, the meeting will be at a retreat house.
- In 2024, the meeting will again be at Villa Maria del Mar in Santa Cruz, CA.
- The dates for this meeting will be May 22-29, 2024.
- Fr Joseph Wittstock and M Kathy Ullrich will continue to serve as assistant moderators.

## EVALUATION

- Peaceful, was the description most often given to our meeting place this year on the shores of the Pacific Ocean. “In many subliminal ways this place is good.” It has a “soul” that exudes a subtle, encompassing hospitality relative to the gracious hospitality of our hostesses, the Sisters of the Holy Names of Jesus and Mary. This was a good meeting, and the location was a contributing factor. While there certainly are advantages to being at a monastery, a place like a retreat center lifts the burdens of office from the shoulders of all. Whereas when we meet in one of our monasteries, the responsibilities of the Superior hosting the meeting are still in place, his/her attention is divided, and the community experiences additional work and expense.
- While it was the consensus that being at *Villa Maria del Mar* was “a breath of fresh air,” the location was only one ingredient of the quality of the meeting. The high level of trust and supportive bond shared among our superiors, inspired by the “powerful, pastoral and hopeful presence” of our Abbot General, Dom Bernardus, created a positive dynamic that viewed the problems of the present with a realistic hope for the future. There is an ease in our sharing; “it is easy to be with one another.” Over time we have grown as a Region and, as voiced by the President, Dom Gerard, we should welcome more responsibilities.
- The relaxed, interactive presence of Dom Bernardus gave a pastoral quality to the meeting that was helpful and inspiring as we worked with the challenging realities of our times. Dom Bernardus gave of himself generously. We found him “so human,” so one of us. We appreciated the light he shed on issues that need to be confronted as well as the suggestions and challenges he offered us. These interactions helped us feel more connected to the international dimension of the Order. It is good to have “hope at the helm.”
- Both the sharing of house reports and our dreams for the future gave ample opportunity to give expression to our care and support of one another as well as our deep appreciation for the Cistercian charism. We believe it offers hope and vision in the daunting realities of the present. In the house reports we gained greater insight into what is happening in the houses of the Region. “Hearing how fragile we are, was an eye-opener.” There is more fragility than some realized; but there is also wisdom and abundant hope, as evident in the sharing of our dreams for the future. “Glad for the dreamers,” we appreciated the depth and different perspectives of dreams. “They were amazing.”
- As always, the Liturgy was a significant component of our time together. In this regard, heartfelt thanks to M Sofia for planning the liturgies, preparing the booklets, and serving as cantor with Sr Myra, Chapter Delegate. The secretaries were likewise thanked with special recognition of Sr Barbara for her many years of secretarial service to our Region.

Wed evening 7:30: Welcome – Fr Gerard

Schedule/Hskp/Ltgy, etc

To prepare draft of Regional Report: Secretaries & Delegate

Rdrs of Minutes: M Kathy of Crozet, Fr Joseph Wittstock

**REGIONAL MEETING – JUNE 15-20, 2022**

Villa Maria Del Mar

Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday	Monday
8:45 – Terce <b>G</b> Regnl Sec Formation	8:45 – Terce <b>J</b> Hse Reports OLM/Conyers/SRA	8:45 – Terce <b>K</b> Abbot General Report	8:45 – Terce <b>G</b> Superiors' dreams	8:45 – Terce <b>K</b> Regional Report Regional items
Morning Break 10:15–10:30	Morning Break 10:15–10:30	Morning Break 10:15–10:30	Morning Break 10:15–10:30	Morning Break 10:15–10:30
<b>G</b> Regnl Sec Formation	<b>J</b> House Reports Guadalupe/Crozet	<b>K</b> Abbot General	<b>G</b> continued	<b>J</b> continued
<b>Dinner</b>	<b>Dinner</b>	<b>Dinner</b>	<b>Dinner</b>	<b>Dinner</b>
2:00 – None <b>K</b> House Reports Geth/Genesee/New Mel	2:00 – None <b>G</b> House Reports Mepkin/B'vl/Wrentham	2:00 – None <b>J</b> Superiors' dreams	<b>FREE</b>	2:00 – None <b>G</b> continued
Afternoon Break 3:30-3:45	Afternoon Break 3:30-3:45	Afternoon Break 3:30-3:45	Afternoon Break 3:30-3:45	Afternoon Break 3:30-3:45
<b>K</b> House Reports Redwoods/Spencer  (until 5:15 p.m.)	<b>G</b> House Reports Tarrowarra/Vina/Snowms  (until 5:15 p.m.)	<b>J</b> continued  (until 5:15 p.m.)	<b>FREE</b>  (Adoration before Vespers)	<b>G</b> Meeting Evaluation Regnl Mtg 2024 (place and date) Select 2 moderators  (until 5:15 p.m.)

## U.S. REGIONAL STATUTE

(Approved at Regional Meeting 2014) - % changed at 2017 Meeting

**01. US REGION is the official name. The Region is composed of both monks and nuns.**

(Constitution 81; Regional Meeting 1996)

**02. Regional Meetings:**

- A. At least one meeting is held during a General Chapter. Two Regional Meetings are held between General Chapters: usually, one with delegates from the communities, one without delegates.
- B. The first meeting after a General Chapter prepares for the Central Commission
- C. Delegates, elected to attend the General Chapter, attend the Regional Meeting that prepares for the coming General Chapter.
- D. There may be meetings for pastoral sharing.
- E. Parliamentary law is followed during the full regional meeting.
- F. Superiors, Delegates, and Delegates to the General Chapter have a right to vote if the nature of the vote does not restrict this right to the Superiors.

**03. President of the Region is elected by the superiors present at the first Regional Meeting after a General Chapter. The responsibilities are:**

- A. Presiding at Regional Meetings.
- B. Coordinating and moderating Regional Meetings using the help of two assistant moderators if the Regional Meeting opts for these assistants.
- C. Preparing an agenda and circulating it with other necessary information to the superiors.
- D. Inviting a Canadian observer and other persons who are asked to attend.
- E. Providing for secretaries for the Regional Meetings.
- F. Calling mini-meetings when these are required.
- G. Dividing the expenses of a Regional Meeting according to the percentage basis.

**04. Regional Personnel:**

- A. At the end of each Regional Meeting, two assistant moderators are elected for the following Regional Meeting. They form a coordinating committee with the President.
- B. Regional Delegates for the General Chapter are elected at that Regional Meeting with delegates from the communities. Eligible for the Chapter are those monks and nuns delegates present at the Meeting. Electors are the delegates present or the superior of a community which does not have a delegate present. All of these electors (monks and nuns) vote for a monk delegate and a nun delegate.
- C. Regional Secretary of Formation is elected by superiors and delegates at the first Regional Meeting after a General Chapter. He or she chooses an assistant. The secretary's responsibilities are given in #71, Guidelines on Formation.
- D. When the US Region sponsors CSQ, the editor is elected by the US Regional Meeting, by superiors and delegates. The editor's term of office is six years. If a new editor must be named between meetings, the Regional President makes a temporary appointment until the next Regional Meeting. The US Regional Meeting will also elect three Directors whose task is to promote CSQ, to provide counsel to the editor, and to advise the region about its choice of editors. The financial and administrative matters of CSQ are overseen by the Board of Directors of Cistercian Studies

Quarterly, Inc, a board that consists of a President (the editor), a Vice President, a Treasurer (i.e. the administrator of CSQ's current business, who may be an employee), and a Secretary (a monk or nun of the region capable of monitoring the corporation and its finances). If the sponsorship of CSQ passes to another region, these provisions cease to apply.

- E. Cistercian Publications: Members of this Corporation are the superiors of each community. New superiors must be voted in at a Regional Meeting. Meetings of the Corporation are held during a Regional Meeting. (Since CP Board is re-elected every 3 years, this should always be done at the Regional Meeting in the year of the General Chapter.)
- F. A member for the Central Commissions and an alternate are elected at a Regional Meeting during the General Chapter.
- G. Monastic Business Association officials are elected at a Regional Meeting.
- H. Regional Health Plan has an administrator and a substitute elected by the Region.

**05. Regional Expenses**, shared and pro-rated by the communities, are:

- A. The Regional Delegates to General Chapter
- B. Secretaries for Regional Meetings.
- C. Abbot General if he attends a Regional Meeting, and his secretary, but only room and board.
- D. English Speaking Member of the Permanent Council if she/he is present.
- E. Visitors officially invited.
- F. The schedule for pro-rating is:
  - 9% Gethsemani, New Melleray, Spencer, Genesee
  
  - 6.5% Conyers, Guadalupe, Wrentham, Berryville, Vina, Mepkin,, Snowmass, Mississippi
  
  - 4% Redwoods, Santa Rita, Crozet.