

US Regional Report

Conyers, GA

11-18 July 2025



From left to Right: Br. Joseph Paez, D. Anastasius Li, D. Vincent Rogers, B. Chritopher Cheney, M. Sofia Millican, M. Kathy DeVico, B. Joseph Bender, D. Paul Mark, B. Juan Diego Warren, M. Rebecca, D. Joseph Wittstock, D. Elias Dietz, D. Augustine Myslinski, D. Scott Dilworth, S. Rose Oullette, M. Vicki Murray, B. Philip Wodzinski, S. Anna O'Meara, S. Myriam Saint-Vilus, M. Kathy Ullrich, D. Joe Tedesco, B. Paul Andrew

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U.S. REGIONAL MEETING PARTICIPANTS

Our Lady of the Holy Spirit Monastery (Conyers, GA)

June 11-18, 2025

MONASTERY

Berryville
Conyers
Crozet
Gethsemani
Guadalupe
Mepkin
Mississippi
New Melleray
Redwoods
Santa Rita
Spencer
Vina
Wrentham

SUPERIOR

Fr Joseph Wittstock
Fr Augustine Myslinski
M Kathy Ullrich
Fr Elias Dietz
Fr Scott Dilworth
Fr Joseph Tedesco
M Rebecca Stramoski
Br. Paul Andrew Tanner (Local Superior)
M Kathy De Vico
M Victoria Murray
Fr Vincent Rogers
Fr Paul Mark Schwan
M Sofia Millican

MONASTERY

Conyers
Crozet
Gethsemani
Mississippi
Spencer
Vina
Wrentham

DELEGATE

Br Philip Wodzinski
Sr Myriam Saint-Vilus
Br Joseph Bender
Sr Eileen Shields
Br Joseph Paez
Br Christopher Cheney
Sr Rose Oullette

INVITED GUEST

Fr Anastasius Li, Procurator General

SECRETARIES

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

President of the Region: M Kathy Ullrich

Assistant Moderators: Fr Joseph Wittstock, M Sofia Millican

Readers for the Minutes: M Kathy De Vico, M Rebecca Stramoski

Introduction

This year's meeting in preparation for the General Chapter of 2025 benefitted from the welcoming hospitality of our brothers at Conyers. Superiors from 12 of our Region's 13 monasteries attended, as did delegates from seven houses, and Dom Anastasius Li, Procurator General. We greatly missed Dom Gerard of the Abbey of the Genesee, whose younger brother died suddenly a few days before the meeting.

Points of continuity with our deliberations in recent years were experiences of collaboration between houses; means for developing fraternal support and correction; the need to rethink oversized economies and infrastructure; and the accompaniment of fragile communities. Newer issues included the Region's experience of Mothers Immediate and the application of synodal models for community dialogue.

During moments of sharing we experienced the dynamic relation between hope and setbacks. In the words of Dom Joseph's opening homily, "Our challenge and responsibility is to *not* focus solely or predominantly on the latter while ignoring or underestimating the graced evidence of the Spirit of the Lord at work in our communities and the Order. Conversely, it is always tempting, but counterproductive, to sidestep difficult worrying situations and circumstances by focusing primarily on the positive and the edifying."

We had the joy of welcoming a new superior, Dom Scott of Guadalupe, whose youth and fresh perspectives add to our hope for the future.

USA Regional Report

	Solem . Prof.	Temp. Prof.	Nov.	Post.	Oblat	TOT AL	Absent	Non- Stab.
Monks	179	11	9	8	2	209	23	10
Nuns	72	7	1	4	0	84	3	2

Since the last General Chapter several houses in the US Region celebrated their founding Jubilee: Spencer (200th), New Melleray and Gethsemani (175th), Mepkin, Wrentham and Berryville, (75th). These celebrations gave the region the opportunity to look back at our living tradition and heritage. These are significant occasions because they motivate us in our present challenges as well as propelling us in hope to the future.

Our Region is experiencing diminishment due to a lack of new vocations while our seniors are aging. The bulk of the workload falls upon fewer members affecting the observance of monastic practices, interpersonal relationships, mental and physical well-being. Many houses have disproportionate living spaces for their current needs and understaffed industries with outdated equipment. As the Abbot General cautioned, we are at risk of settling in a culture of survival if these issues are not addressed.

There is valuable collaboration between houses in the Region. The superiors support each other through video conferences and pastoral sharing. They also assist each other carrying out Visitations, and more Abbesses are assuming the role of Father Immediate. Some houses generously share their members with other communities to serve as chaplains, guest lecturers, infirmarians, and business consultants. Several Commissions have been established in the Region. One Commission for formation, three Commissions of the Future to support monasteries in their respective journey, and one Commission for Closure. New Melleray and Mississippi share novitiate and juniorate courses; Vina hosted Redwoods for an initial formation course; and Santa Rita and Vina participate in joint online courses. There is also collaboration at the level of communities especially in the areas of initial and on-going formation such as the southeast formation cluster, the Mepkin renewal week retreat for solemnly professed, Junior seminars, and Novice Director meetings. The Region also has a common website as a reference portal to our individual houses.

Knowing that human development bolsters spiritual development and facilitates integration, we strive to foster effective communication both within and between houses. We have taken various initiatives to implement community dialogues using the synodal method among others. Holy leisure to relieve busyness and stress is encouraged. The inter-cultural and inter-generational nature of our Region provides a broad wealth of wisdom and experience for our communities.

No one is in denial of our many challenges. Our houses have been tried and stretched. But as a Region, we recognize this moment of uncertainty as a providential moment for building faith, hope, and courage, that leads to new life. Our hope is palpable.

Law Commission

M Kathy DeVico reviewed the following documents revised by the Law Commission in December 2024 as requested by the Central Commission in June 2024, taking into account the work of the Regions.

Mothers Immediate

Not many changes were made to the working document. The thrust of this working paper is on permanent Mothers Immediate, while currently the delegation of Mothers Immediate is *ad experimentum*. The importance of the issue of Mothers Immediate was highlighted in the discussion since the matter of having a sufficient number of Fathers Immediate to meet the need has been a concern for at least the past two Chapters. Our experience during this period of experimentation will prove valuable in moving towards permanent Mothers Immediate.

Statute on Affiliation

The document is now a Statute. The Statute of Affiliation draws its structure from *Cor Orans*. To make it more adaptable to our Order it is currently *ad experimentum*. Presently, we have two fragile communities utilizing affiliation.

AFFILIATED	AFFILIATING
1. Alloz	La Palma
2. Baumgarten	Val d'Igny

In discussion, having all the initial formation of new members for the affiliated house to take place in the affiliating community was a point of concern. Likewise, the suspension of the conventual chapter is ambiguous, since the consent of the conventual chapter of the affiliated community is needed to admit a novice to temporary profession. The importance of the involvement of the Father Immediate of the affiliated house was also stressed. A question came up on whether the affiliating house could delegate part of the formation to another house. Also, was the insight that the work of an affiliating community is more comprehensive than that of a Monastic Commissary.

Statute on the Accompaniment of Fragile Communities and on the Suppression of a Monastery

Discussion surfaced a concern that at the Chapter the Statute is slated to be voted on by simplified procedure while there are a number of issues in the document that were unclear in our Region.

These points include the following:

- The process to be followed in the order of appointments of a Commission for the Future and a Monastic Commissary
- The suspension of the conventual chapter once a Monastic Commissary is appointed while the community may continue to receive candidates
- The revision of the text regarding the composition of the Commission for Closure in paragraph 22 makes it possible to appoint to the Commission persons outside the Order.

It was decided to petition the Coordinating Commission to move the Statute from simplified to ordinary procedure which will permit discussion before the final vote of the Chapter is taken. Therefore, a petition to the Coordinating Commission for a Change of Procedure was prepared, and signed by all superiors who will be present at the General Chapter. We presently have 11

signatures, and will circulate the petition at the beginning of the Chapter to acquire the 25 signatures required for a change of procedure. See Appendix I.

Proposal For the Harmonization of Some Points of The Constitutions of Monks and Nuns

This proposal addresses the study by the Law Commission of points that can be harmonized between the Constitutions of the monks and nuns as requested by the Central Commission, some of which are more important than others. Explanation of each proposed change is given in the working papers on Harmonization. Fr. Elias briefly reviewed a few of those considered more important or, perhaps, not readily understandable. The exception was the substantial discussion evoked by ST 56.3 monks and ST 57 & C74.3 nuns on the formula of profession.

<p>ST 56.3 monks This is the formula of profession: I, Brother <i>N</i>, promise my stability, my fidelity to the monastic way of life, and obedience until death in accordance with the Rule of Saint Benedict, Abbot. I do this before God and all his saints, in this monastery of <i>N</i>, of the Cistercian Order of the Strict Observance, constructed in honour of the Blessed and ever Virgin Mary, Mother of God, and in the presence of Dom <i>N</i>, abbot of this monastery.</p>	<p>ST 57 nuns This is the formula of profession: I, Sister <i>N</i>, promise my stability, my fidelity to the monastic way of life, and obedience until death in accordance with the Rule of Saint Benedict, Abbot. I do this before God and all his saints, in this monastery of <i>N</i>, of the Cistercian Order of the Strict Observance, constructed in honour of the Blessed and ever Virgin Mary, Mother of God, and in the presence of <i>N.</i>, abbess of this monastery and Dom <i>N.</i>, Father Immediate.</p>
<p>C 74 monks <i>Nothing is said here</i></p>	<p>C 74.3 nuns The Father Immediate also presides at solemn professions...</p>

Discussion centered on the role of the Father Immediate, or his delegation of the bishop, at the solemn profession of nuns. There is no mention of the Father Immediate at the profession of monks. Pertinent to the matter is the possibility of Mothers Immediate filling the role of Fathers Immediate. Several questions surfaced. Given that the abbess receives the vows of the sister making profession, does the Father Immediate need to be present? Why the delegation of the bishop, if the Father Immediate cannot preside? Would it not suffice that the presider at Mass simply be a priest? Furthermore, must the Monastic Consecration be given by the Father Immediate or his delegate? Could it be given by the abbess? A breakthrough in the conversation came with, first, reference to the Cistercian Ritual and, second, with recourse to the Abbot General by Fr. Anastasius.

1. #20. The Rite of Solemn Profession and the Blessing or Consecration of a Monk/Nun in the Cistercian Ritual - *Solemn profession, with the blessing or consecration of the monk, takes place during Mass, so that it may be seen that monastic profession has a public character in the Church. The priest celebrant is the Abbot in houses of monks and the Father Immediate in houses of nuns or his delegate, the Bishop of the diocese.*
2. Paraphrase of reply sent to Fr. Anastasius by Dom Bernardus, June 17, 2025 - The abbess receives the vows and a priest is present to give the consecration. This priest can be the bishop, the Father Immediate if he is a priest, the chaplain, or any delegated priest. The consecration has nothing to do with the role of the Father Immediate, it is linked to priesthood as an official representative of the church.

The vade mecum for the Father Immediate says: it is necessary to make a distinction between the profession received by the abbess and the monastic consecration given by the celebrant... This ‘consecration,’ which is not a sacrament, is reserved to any priest.

A Mother Immediate, present at the solemn profession, cannot give the official ‘consecration’ because she is not a priest. She can give a blessing (say a prayer of blessing) but this is not the monastic consecration.

Houses with Special Commissions

It is the responsibility of each community, under the leadership of its superior, to look realistically at its situation, not only from a human point of view, but especially from the point of view of faith. An experience of fragility should be accepted as an invitation of the Lord to choose life by entering into the Paschal mystery. (Statute on the Accompaniment of Fragile Communities, No. 3.)

Snowmass

The General Chapter of September 2022 voted to close the monastery of Snowmass. The legal status of Snowmass still exists in civil and canon law until the property is sold. Only then can the monastery be legally *suppressed* by the General Chapter, and the Commission for Closure complete its mandate.

Sale of the property has been difficult due to local ordinances prohibiting development of the land. There are five brothers of Snowmass living a modest community life on site, assisted by Dom Damian (Monastic Commissary) and Br. Amadeus of Spencer, who serves as infirmarian. Guided by the Commission for Closure, the brothers have changed their stability to monasteries in the Spencer filiation, and will transfer to their new monasteries when Snowmass is officially suppressed.

New Melleray

In August of 2023 Dom Bernardus appointed M. Rebecca of Mississippi as Mother Immediate of New Melleray. Dom Brendan continued to serve as superior *ad nutum* until November of 2024, when, after hearing the counsel of New Melleray's Commission for the Future, the Abbot General appointed Dom Joseph of Berryville as Monastic Commissary. (cf. Statute on the Accompaniment of Fragile Communities, No. 10.)

Both Mother Immediate and Monastic Commissary appreciate the flexibility of the *ad experimentum* Statute for Fragile Communities, which allows the novice at New Melleray to receive his formation at home, and provides for dynamic collaboration with a local delegate, Br. Paul Andrew, who takes care of the daily needs of the community. As a sign of creative collaboration, Mississippi has generously assigned their novice mistress to accompany Br. Philip, sacrificing her presence one day a week that she may offer instruction and spiritual direction. He in turn has made the short trip to Mississippi to attend formation classes. Moreover, a team of two sisters and two brothers has worked locally to promote vocations and sponsor Come-and-See retreats. All involved have seen new energy in the many initiatives undertaken, and pray and watch for signs that New Melleray may one day regain autonomous status.

Santa Rita

In June of last year, Santa Rita suffered the death of three sisters and the temporary departure of a fourth to her native Africa due to immigration regulations. In the space of one month the community was brought from eleven to seven, raising questions about viability. In January M. Vicki requested a Commission for the Future from her Father Immediate, Dom Paul Mark of Vina, which the sisters have received with gratitude and hope.

Santa Rita has one junior, and expects the return of their sister from Africa in July.

Mepkin

Since 2020 a Commission for the Future appointed by the General Chapter has accompanied Mepkin Abbey. The Superior *ad nutum* regime will be reviewed at the 2025 Chapter. The brothers' openness and willingness to work with the Commission continues to bear positive results. There are now five men in initial formation, and younger members have taken on greater responsibility toward the development of future leadership.

The Mepkin community continues to recite a prayer for vocations at the end of daily Mass, and each Monday the community Mass is offered for this intention. The formation team is invested in a personalized and integrated approach to formation which takes into consideration the elements of ecclesial and monastic formation, and human development.

Presentation by Dom Anastasius, Procurator General

On the third day of our meeting, Dom Anastasius Li, monk of Lantao and Procurator General, presented an overview of issues receiving special attention at the General Chapter.

Regions and Subregions

Capitulants will study the issue of demographics that affects the way each geo-cultural region finds its voice in the Order's governance. The growth of our Order in Africa, Asia and Latin America has resulted in approximately equal membership in these two sectors of the globe: Europe and North America on the one hand, and the rest of the world on the other. However, the Order's Regional map still reflects the demographic distribution of an earlier day. Of the eleven Regions, seven are in Europe and North America, and four comprise the rest of the world. The latter include Africa (RAFMA), Asia (ORIENS), Latin America (REMILA) and the southeastern Mediterranean countries (REM).

The Regional structure of our Order determines the membership of the Central Commission (cf. ST 80.B.) This organ in turn sets the agenda for the General Chapter, precisely "by coordinating the initiatives coming from the Regional Conferences" (ST 80.E.). A new Regional distribution, therefore, will ensure a more balanced membership and presentation of initiatives at the Central Commission, following the evolving demographics of the Order.

Hopefully, dividing a large Region into two smaller ones will favor collaboration where unwieldy geographical, linguistic and cultural distances raise obstacles. Conversely, combining two small Regions into a single larger one will broaden the pool of resources in areas where the members' availability to serve as regional delegates and secretaries is limited. Small Regions that have amalgamated may still function informally as Subregions and enjoy the benefits of collaboration within a smaller cultural and linguistic group, meet for pastoral sharing, formation initiatives, etc. Likewise, a new Region may still wish to form Subregions.

Term Limits

Capitulants at this year's General Chapter will vote on proposals for term limits for the Abbot General, his Councilors, members of the Law Commission and other commissions serving the Order. Currently, once elected, the Abbot General serves for an indefinite term. More exactly, he "is to offer his resignation to the General Chapter nearest to his 75th birthday." (Statute 83.2.A.) Certainly, there is a wisdom in allowing the Order to benefit from the accumulated experience of its Supreme Moderator; and the same can be said for other officers serving the Order. Yet some are questioning the old wisdom.

According to the working paper on Mandates, "Given the evermore demanding scope of the Abbot General's service, which constitutes a global ministry requiring a personal exercise of the office to communities and persons, and the quickening and challenging pace of change with regards to many of our communities, their complex needs and ongoing discernment for a number regarding

their futures, it is both charitable and expedient that the Abbot General's service be set within realistic parameters."

Dom Anastasius shared his personal experience. "Life in the Generalate is not exactly in a monastic setting. It demands very much of the person who serves, of how you keep yourself in the Spirit... It's like a half-hermit life. Yes, we pray and eat together. There are meetings. Otherwise, everyone can stay in his room, which is his office, and work individually. It's quite demanding in this sense. It can also be an enriching experience for the person. It helps me not only to have a greater sense of the Order and the communities, but also in helping individuals."

Extraordinary Administration

Addressing the *labora* side of our charism, Dom Anastasius presented a graduated schema for determining when and to whom approval needs to be sought for acts of extraordinary administration. His presentation was drawn from the work of D. Emmanuel, bursar of the Order, which is available to the superiors in the reserved section of the Orders' website.

Canon law prescribes a theoretical maximum figure, above which the approval of the Holy See is required, for acts such as alienation of property, construction and demolition of buildings, and others. It is left to the bishops' conferences of each country to define that figure in the local currency.

In addition to the amount established by the bishops, there are lesser expenditures that our Constitutions prescribe as needing varying degrees of official approval, whether by the General Chapter, the Conventual Chapter, or the Finance Committee.

Actually, the General Chapter has yet to legislate theoretical or practical limits for each level of approval. In practice, however, the following schema has been observed:

- From 50% to 99.99% of the amount established by the local bishops' conference, approval of the General Chapter or Abbot General and his Council is required.
- From 20% to 50%, approval of the Conventual Chapter.
- Up to 20%, consultation of the Finance Committee.

When a higher level of approval is needed, the lower levels need to have given their consent also. In the case of the Finance Committee, however, only consultation is required.

Formation

A New Commission

Until this year a Regional Secretary has overseen formative activities at the Regional level, with full responsibility for organizing the annual Junior Seminar. In recent years, the Secretary has advised the Region that the job is too heavy for a single person, who typically holds multiple responsibilities in his or her community. To remedy this, a Commission for Formation has been established, consisting of M Kathy of Redwoods, Dom Joseph of Berryville, Sr Maria of Crozet and Fr Isaac of Genesee.

A New *Ratio Institutionis*

One of the first tasks of the Commission was to submit ideas to the Generalate for a revised *Ratio Institutionis*. This topic will be addressed at the General Chapter. M Kathy of Redwoods presented a preparatory analysis from the US Regional Commission, synthesizing strengths and weaknesses of our current *Ratio* and explaining why the *Ratio* needs to be updated (See Appendix II.). The following comments were then offered by the superiors and delegates:

New issues which are being faced by the Church need to be incorporated in our *Ratio*, such as guidelines for prevention of abuse; and the prescriptions for women's communities set forth in *Cor Orans*. Particular to our Order, we need to modify our guidelines for the training and preparation of formators and teachers. We need to take advantage of the opportunities for study via electronic means. Finally, a revised *Ratio* is desired to allow room for a more personalized approach to formation so we may better accompany the diverse needs of people in formation today.

Strengths. An updated *Ratio* should continue to insist on ongoing assimilation of the sacred sciences. "Some of the principles contained in the *Ratio* clearly reflect the monastic approach to learning, including the development of a taste for private study which should not be separated from but express our desire for God." Personal study will in turn foster "an awareness of the content of the faith and the monastic patrimony that creates an increased capacity of reflection on our own beliefs and values."

Weaknesses. Many in the Order have expressed criticism that the comprehensive intellectual goals set by the *Ratio* are too impractical for most communities. The Formation Commission observes: "Providing a list of courses as we find in number 42 of the *Ratio* can be problematic not only because the capacity for communities and individuals to fulfill these requirements greatly varies, but because it can give the formation process a clerical orientation."

Formation to Community. One of the most notable shifts of emphasis in a new *Ratio* will be the emphasis on formation to community. Our Region's Commission observes: "Within Western culture, the increasing individualism prevalent in society can have a negative impact on the Cistercian *conversatio* creating an artificial and harmful separation between the personal and communal search for God." Even before formation is undertaken, it may be necessary to ensure that today's candidates have a basic predisposition to community life. Candidate screening should seek evidence of "a balanced expression of emotions, capacity to form meaningful relationships

that encourage spiritual growth and provide support in times of crisis, desire to serve the community through work and obedience," among other aspects.

Comments of participants. The need for tailor-made approaches for each individual in formation was particularly recognized, marking a difference from previous generations, whose backgrounds were more homogeneous. If individual differences are taken into account, however, how do we form toward a common identity? No one proposes suppressing classes on catechetical, theological and monastic themes. But unless a journey is underway, candidates won't be ready to receive this formation, or make the connection between theology and life. Individualized formation involves accompaniment in human development. Finally, formation is not oriented toward an undifferentiated contemplative vocation, but must help candidates recognize and welcome a specifically Cistercian charism.

Collaboration in the Region

Junior Seminar

Next year's Junior Seminar is planned for Berryville, with March 9-23 as preferred dates. Presenters are being sought with the hope of including material on the Rule of St. Benedict and the Desert Fathers. A meditation on the season of Lent and the Paschal mystery is also desired, as the dates for the Seminar fall during Lent. Since juniors have consistently expressed their appreciation when formators accompany the Seminar, Dom Joseph of Berryville and Sr Maria of Crozet plan to be on hand.

Formators' Meetings

The next novice directors' meeting is planned for Vina in June of next year. The junior directors' meeting, however, in the words of one superior, "seems to have run out of steam." One reason is that some superiors also serve as junior directors, and have travel agendas that are already too full. Other junior directors have multiple responsibilities in community and likewise are hard pressed to travel. A proposal was made to seek ways of reviving the Junior Directors' meeting.

Initiatives in Geographical Clusters

Our houses' diminishing membership makes the call to pool resources more urgent. Yet the vastness of our Region makes this difficult. The idea of local "clusters" to take advantage of geographical proximity is slowly taking root. In the Southeast, the monasteries of Mepkin, Crozet, Berryville and Conyers have collaborated over the past three years to offer weeks of conferences for those in formation, a kind of mini-seminar. And in recent months Mepkin hosted a program of renewal for solemn professed to which all monasteries of the Region received invitations. A similar invitation will be extended for a meeting planned for June of 2026 at Vina. The topic will be The Nuns of Helfta, presented by Dr. Ella Johnson from St Ambrose University, Iowa.

Online Initiatives

Study online allows communities with competent teachers to share their resources with other communities as in the case of Vina and Santa Rita. Members of the Formation Commission are also planning to take advantage of video technology for the accompaniment and formation of simply professed and young solemn professed monks and nuns.

Regional Matters

MBA

Fr. Vincent reported that an application for the OCSO Trademark has been submitted to the US Patent and Trademark Office (USPTO). Approval is pending and is expected within nine months. Meanwhile, it is permissible for our monasteries to use the trademark on our products. Fr. Vincent will make available graphic formats and instructions for their use. It was clarified that a monastery can utilize the trademark even if its products are not actually made by the monks or nuns; it is sufficient that the monastery owns the business.

Cistercian Studies Quarterly

Fr. Mark Scott continues as editor of CSQ. The publication is doing well in relation to content and function. It is a scholarly magazine with a good reputation. Fr. Jerome Macher is an excellent administrator. Subscriptions by universities for digital publications continue to grow. However, continuing printed publications remains a financial challenge. The income from printed subscriptions does not cover expenses which are steadily increasing. Fr. Jerome proposes raising the cost to make the publication self-sustaining. At present this would mean an increase from \$40 to \$70 per annual subscription. In addition to Fr. Jerome's suggestion, two other possible options were presented to meet this need. They are as follows:

- (A) Raise the price of CSQ from \$40 to \$70 and ask the administrator to keep CSQ financially independent
- (B) Make a modest adjustment of the price of CSQ (e.g., in the \$50-55 range) and continue to ask the US Region occasionally to contribute to the cost of running CSQ
- (C) Make a modest adjustment of the price of CSQ (e.g., in the \$50-55 range) and establish a fund to support CSQ for the foreseeable future

C was chosen with 9 votes

Cistercian Publications

Fr. Elias reported that Cistercian Publications is healthier and stronger than pre-Covid. In 2024 we received income from Liturgical Press. Nonetheless, he sees Cistercian Publications as coasting for the following reasons. There is not a lot of energy in the Order for keeping it going. It has accomplished its purpose of getting major Cistercian authors in print and our contract with Liturgical Press states that LP will continue to keep them in print. We are presently blessed with an exceptional and dedicated editor. Although she has no plans to retire she is of retirement age, and it would be good to keep in mind the need for a new editor at some point in the future.

Cistercian Publications is a business owned by the Corporation composed of the Superiors of the US Region. Therefore, it was necessary to vote Fr. Scott Dilworth, the new Abbot of Gudalupe, into the Corporation. This was accomplished with 11 votes.

Board of Directors – According to the Bylaws of the Corporation, 4 members of the Board need to be Cistercians, two of whom are superiors. Currently, they are Fr. Elias (president), Fr. Gerard (treasurer), M. Kathy of Crozet, and M. Sofia. While Fr. Gerard and Fr. Elias agree to continue, M. Kathy and M. Sofia asked to be replaced. Nominations were opened and Sr. Jennifer Illig of Wrentham, Fr. Lawrence Morey of Gethsemani, and Fr. Joseph VanHouse, OCist of Dallas, were nominated. Sr. Jennifer and Fr. Joseph were elected. Efforts to contact Fr. Joseph were not successful. Given that it was the last day of the meeting, the superiors proceeded to elect the following to the Board with the caveat that if Fr. Joseph declined, Fr. Lawrence would take his place:

- Fr. Elias Dietz (President, Cistercian member)
- Fr. Gerard D’Souza (Treasurer, Cistercian member)
- Sr. Jennifer Illig (Cistercian member)
- Fr. Joseph VanHouse (Cistercian member) – Replaced by Fr. Lawrence Morey
- Marsha Dutton (Executive Editor)
- Tyler Sergent (Lay Expert)
- Christopher Bellito (Lay Expert)

ADDENDUM: Fr. Joseph VanHouse, OCist declined the offer to serve on the Board because his responsibilities at the University of Dallas conflict with the time of the annual meeting of the CP Board. He hopes to serve in the future, and offers any assistance possible in the meantime. Therefore, Fr. Lawrence replaces him.

Shared Experience of an Economic/Operational Review

Fr Elias was asked to share Gethsemani's experience of having a third-party review of their operations.

"At our last regular visitation, the visitors invited us to evaluate our industries and the size of our buildings. As a result of a community dialogue on this topic, we decided we needed an objective view of our situation from an outside visitor. We invited the cellarer of Genesee, Fr. John Vianney, to study our finances, our industries, and our living and work spaces. This was not an "economic visitation" in the strict sense but broader overview of all our operations. The outcome was an analysis of our situation and a series of recommendations. Among these recommendations were adjustments to our financial practices and planning, consolidation of the monks' living quarters, adjustments to our service of hospitality, and the possibility of hiring a lay manager for our industries. We found this outside, objective analysis helpful. We have acted on some of these suggestions already. Others require more time and planning to implement."

Some ideas and experiences that flowed from this sharing include:

- Monks cannot keep pace with new developments in accounting, laws, etc. It is good to hire outside resources with the professional knowledge for labor relations, tax laws,

investments, etc. Some of our houses are already sharing these professional resources with other houses.

- RCRI (Resource Center for Religious Institutes) holds an annual conference focusing on accounting, new laws, etc. RCRI does offer discounts for membership. The annual conference is free (travel, lodging and registration) to members.
- Double signatures on checks over a certain amount is helpful, though not regulated by the bank.
- Two-person review of credit card and bank statements.
- Limited access to credit cards.
- Lowering credit card limits to limit exposure on card fraud
- Paying with credit cards vs. cash offers a transparency into spending
- Monthly review of monastery's accounts by the superior and finance council.
- Annual review of finances with the whole community to increase transparency for spending, saving and investing
- Be sure that people do not cross rolls where there may be a conflict of checks and balances
- Gathering deeds and documents for property, etc. in one place, for easy accessibility. See the document provided by the Generalate titled, "Audit of the Financial and Economic Situation." This is a good guide and resource for reflecting on the various aspects that effect our economies and keeps us transparent and responsible in our fiscal activities.
- Perhaps a joint meeting of our accountants would be helpful
- NRRO (National Religious Retirement Office) was extremely helpful reviewing financial accounts in preparation for a grant and the establishment of retirement funds.
- SOAR (Supporting our Aging Religious) is an organization under NRRO that provides funding for projects to support Seniors (elevators, wheelchairs, hospital beds, etc.)

The Near Future

Regional Meeting 2026

Superiors of Our Region who attended Spencer's 200th anniversary celebration in April met as a group with our Abbot General. Dom Bernardus challenged the US Region to further accentuate collaboration among monasteries. Many instances of collaboration in the Region already exist, however, we still need to plan for the future as a Region.

To address the Abbot General's challenge, a Regional Meeting is scheduled for next year to focus specifically on the theme of collaboration. The purpose will be to brainstorm, to create a structure that will "help us think of things we didn't think of, and help us know what we didn't know," as one superior put it. Discussion and vote yielded the following parameters.

- An outside facilitator is desired, precisely to stimulate creative thinking. The place will be a non-monastic setting.

- The length of the meeting will be five days, excluding travel days, with an agenda spaced to allow time for reflection.
- Fr. Joe of Mepkin will work together with the President and Assistant Moderators, to organize the meeting. Time and place will be established as possibilities become clear.

Regional Delegate to the General Chapter

According to the Regional Statute, superiors and delegates voted for a delegate from among those present to represent the Region at the General Chapter. Sr. Myriam Saint-Vilus of Crozet was elected with Br. Joseph Bender of Gethsemani as the alternate.

Assistant Moderators

M Sofia of Wrentham was voted to continue as a Moderator for a second term. Dom Joseph of Berryville stepped down after serving two terms, with Dom Augustine of Conyers being voted to replace him. M Kathy of Crozet continues as President of the Region.

Evaluation

We expressed our gratitude to Fr. Augustine and the Conyers Community for the hospitality extended throughout the week. Excellent preparations in advance of our arrival contributed greatly to the atmosphere of peace experienced throughout our time together at work, at prayer, and in-between. Repeatedly, the liturgy was described as prayerful in its peace and simplicity. We appreciated the setting of the renovated church, the new choir stalls and the carefully prepared Office books. We profited from the reflections (texts, poetry, songs) prayed at Terce and None before each meeting.

Organized and flexible, the meeting itself ‘flowed’ comfortably with ‘no sense of pressure or tension,’ even as “bordering on ‘holy leisure.’” A longer meridian would be welcome in the future. Words of thanks were paid to the President, M. Kathy Ullrich, and the Moderators, Fr. Joseph Wittstock, and M. Sofia Millican for a job well done. The contribution of a gradually improved use of technology did not go unnoticed and thanks were given to M. Kathy for managing the link to the meeting website. An encouraging word was spoken for all to be “more deliberate” about going paperless during meetings.

Superiors expressed gratitude for the bond of unity and spirit of collaboration that they experienced among themselves. In and through pastoral sharing they came to know a ‘common fragility expressed in various ways.’ The transparency, openness, and honesty in this sharing of fragility is strengthening, and supportive. As evident in the House Reports, “there is a blend of reality and hope in the Region.” In his own words Fr. Anastasius was “amazed by the relationship among houses in this Region.” There is a “mutual openness...filiations are intertwined.” Esteem for our

Superiors also found wholesome expression among the delegates. “I love the way you all are like brothers and sisters,” “to see the love and passion to live Cistercian life...the wisdom and courage.”

The delegates described their opportunity to participate in the Regional Meeting as ‘a formative experience’ and gave their thanks for being actively included in the meeting with the opportunity to write the Regional Report. These sentiments of appreciation flowed both ways, as evident in the many words of gratitude and delight for the presence and contributions of the delegates by the Superiors, who “found them so refreshing.”

Being together at this meeting provided the opportunity for us to celebrate and give thanks to M. Kathy DeVico for her years of dedicated service to the Region and Order. We are pleased to welcome Fr. Scott Dilworth, Abbot of Guadalupe, and to extend our gratitude to Fr. Anastasius Li, Procurator General, for his gracious presence.

Appendix I

Petition to the Coordinating Commission for a Change of Procedure

We wish to treat the *Statute on Fragile Communities and on the Suppression of a Monastery*, as revised by the Law Commission in December of 2024, by **Ordinary Procedure** at the General Chapter of 2025, and not by Simplified Procedure as decided by the Central Commission of 2024.

The reason for this petition is that too many points in the document remain unclear, require more discussion, or need to be revised in the light of recent experience. To point out only a few examples:

- In paragraph 9, the establishment of a Commission for the Future by the General Chapter appears to be a necessary step before proceeding with the appointment of a Monastic Commissary as described in paragraph 10. However, in practice, the Abbot General and his Council have been creating these commissions at the time of appointing Commissaries.
- According to paragraph 12, once a Monastic Commissary is appointed, the conventual chapter is suspended. However, if the community has continued to train novices, there is no conventual chapter to take the necessary vote to allow them to make profession.
- In paragraph 22, on the Commission of Closure, the revised text makes it possible to elect persons from outside the Order by saying “More than half the (five) members should belong to the Order.” This change in the text was not discussed at the General Chapter of 2022 and was not requested by the Regions.

Appendix II Towards Renewal of our *Ratio Institutionis*

These suggestions for the revision of the *Ratio Institutionis* are based on contributions of the members of the formation commission of the US region. The commission is composed of four members: one abbess, one abbot, and two novice directors. We marked three essential areas that need to be addressed:

1. Necessary updates due to new circumstances

- New legislation:
 - Incorporation of the new regulations of *Cor Orans*.
 - Guidelines for prevention of abuse.
- Changes in some of the features of our communities:
 - a) Many communities are experiencing a decrease in the number of vocations and an increase in the age of the candidates. Differences between candidates in prior formation or culture of origin demand personalized formation programs.
 - b) The fact that numerous communities have become smaller reduces the number of monks and nuns able to provide formation while simultaneously increases the demands on formators as well as those in initial formation. This reality needs to be taken into consideration. If we want to ensure adequate formation of candidates, we need not only to describe principles but to provide practical guidelines and resources to construct actual formation programs that will remain fruitful in a wide range of contexts.
- The new media of communication open new possibilities for sharing resources and personnel between communities and facilitate access to programs for technical and specialized formation.

2. Need for greater emphasis on formation to community

Each community needs to find an appropriately enculturated expression of the Cistercian tradition. Within Western culture, the increasing individualism prevalent in society can have a negative impact on the Cistercian *conversatio* creating an artificial and harmful separation between the personal and communal search for God. Silence and solitude remain essential values to be fostered during initial and ongoing formation as a privileged space of encounter with God and unceasing prayer. Still, care is to be taken that these values not serve to reinforce self-will or foster bitter zeal.

Are there common features, given the multicultural character of our Order, that can be described as indicators of an adequate disposition to community life? A balanced expression of emotions, capacity to form meaningful relationships that encourage spiritual growth and provide support in times of crisis (53-54), desire to serve the community through work and obedience, these and other aspects need to be considered in the psychological evaluation and screening of candidates to ensure their capacity to live fruitfully the communal aspect of our vocation.

3. Formation within the Cistercian tradition

Now as in the twelfth century, the central question in the school of charity is how we can love God more. Discerning and nurturing the Cistercian grace (73) implies an affective and effective growth in love of God and neighbor, the love that leads us to contemplation through conversion. A central goal and gift of the Cistercian charism is providing us with tools to understand this path to love. Cistercian monks and nuns need not only to know our spiritual heritage but to be able to apply it in their daily lives in a way that fosters greater cooperation between divine grace and human action. The practice of the monastic disciplines (6) by itself is not enough to ensure the personal consent necessary for grace to heal, transform, and ultimately make us one with God in the Spirit. The capacity for naming our struggles as well as and the necessary awareness to respond to the graces bestowed on us through the monastic practices is an essential foundation for our growth in prayer and our shared life in community.

Some of the principles contained in the *Ratio* clearly reflect the monastic approach to learning, including the development of a taste for private study which should not be separated from but express our desire for God. (43). These principles underline the connection between monastic virtues, work, and prayer (52), and the importance of fostering an awareness of the content of the faith and the monastic patrimony that creates an increased capacity of reflection on our own beliefs and values (40). Initial and ongoing formation is meant to support us in this process of learning to read not only written texts but the book of our own experience as well as the signs of the times. It is necessary to supplement *lectio* with other subjects to help each monk and nun to penetrate the mystery of Christ and his Church (48) and fully benefit from the Cistercian *conversatio* personally and communally. Still, providing a list of courses as we find in number 42 of the *Ratio* can be problematic not only because the capacities for communities and individuals to fulfill these requirements greatly varies, but because it can give the formation process a clerical orientation. How can we speak about areas of study during the different stages of formation without creating a false divide between study, monastic practices, and the work of the Spirit within us?

May our Cistercian Fathers and Mothers, who learned to savor the Word in *Lectio Divina*, celebrated it in the Liturgy, and embodied it in work and hospitality, grant us their wisdom so that we can continue to share it with future generations of Cistercian brothers and sisters.

Appendix III Homily of Dom Anastasius

Ord. XI Tuesday (Blessed M. Joseph Cassant, OCSO)

Today I would like to teach you 2 Chinese characters. Maybe some of you know them already. Then, treat it as a revision, a repetition. The first word is composed of two parts, on the left side of the character is the symbol of a man 人 (or a human), and on the right-hand side of the character is the symbol of the number two 二. 2 persons. The word is pronounced as 仁 “REN”. And what does this Chinese character mean in English? Benevolence, Charity, and Mercy. So, whoever invented this character had the insight and wanted to remind us that whenever two (or more) persons are together, there’s got to be charity and mercy in their midst and relate them. Put it in another way, Charity -mercy-benevolence is the virtue to practice when one person meets another.

The second Chinese character is LOVE. 愛 “AI”. And what does the character look like? It is also composed of two parts. First, you have the character which means the HEART 心. Then you put the heart inside another character 受 which means ‘to take in, to accept, to keep, to bear...’. And so, the composition of the Chinese character LOVE already tells us its definition ... It is a matter of the heart, an act of the heart. It is ...to take into heart the other person, to accept the other down to the level of the heart, and to bear even when it hurts to love.

Sometimes, I can be still so amazed by how the gospel values have been implanted in ancient cultures already, such as in the Chinese written language, and how that can actually make evangelization much easier. In fact, when the Chinese hear Jesus’ teachings in the Gospel, we can easily associate them with our traditional values and virtues, whether it be from Confucianism or Taoism, even Chinese Buddhism. Concepts like ‘Love your enemies, toleration and forgiveness... universal love...these are fundamental spirit of Confucianism. Also, the Tao, that is the origin of all beings, indiscriminately embraces and tolerates everything, everyone, and the Tao takes care of all beings without distinction. And we are asked to follow the Tao. That is why when I first heard the Sermon on the Mount when I was a teenager, I felt familiar and comfortable, very close. The Holy Spirit can certainly work powerfully across times and cultures to lead us toward unity, on the path to the Kingdom of God, but not division, aggression, and retaliation.

I said all these, because to me, these two words are so rich and deep in meaning that I can use them to contemplate the teaching of the gospel reading today: 仁 and 愛, rich enough for the day.

Let us hope and pray that God the Father continues to be patient with each one of us and wait for our ever-renewed conversion, that we may imitate his son Jesus to truly believe and practice

charity, mercy and compassion, and that the Holy Spirit be our strength and our courage in walking on this journey of 仁 愛.

仁	愛
Rén	Ai