

FOREWORD

The meeting of the Central Commission has now ended and one can say that we have worked in a serious and relaxed atmosphere without ever feeling tensions during the course of our discussions; in fact almost all the votes – except those concerning elections - were taken by a show of hands. The hospitality of the Community of Cardeña was very cordial. We shared in their liturgy and meals and many other occasions and felt the availability and the spirit of service of the Father Abbot and the monks of the Community. We found the meeting room was just right for our use and all greatly appreciated the sound system and the simultaneous translation. We also appreciated the possibility of the internet connection to remain in contact with our Communities.

The monastic church is a splendid Gothic building with some 18th century additions. The church carries the remembrance of the two hundred monks massacred by the Moslems in the 9th century and that of El Cid. Recently the church was tastefully renovated. The monastery quadrangle is of the 18th century. The area occupied by the Community has been remodeled. The remodeled area is simple and adequate. Many of us who lived in the Community space found it a very good living area. Of course we followed the Spanish horarium with Lauds and Mass at 7:30, then the noon meal at 2:00 PM! The morning wok sessions were each two hours with a break. In the afternoon we came together at 4:00 PM for one work session. Vespers was at 7:00 PM and the evening meal at 8:00 PM and Compline at 9:15 PM. All that gives one the impression that in Spain a day has twenty-eight hours!

We worked quickly through the program. Two reasons were that the Regions had done their work very well and had given a number of suggestions which the Council of the Abbot General synthesized into eighteen pages. All the points presented by the Regions were examined one after the other with a view to establishing the program and the sequence for the Mixed General Meeting in September 2008. We also functioned as the Plenary Council of the Abbot General. As the Plenary Council we were informed of the situation of three monasteries of Nuns in France (Belval, Grâce Dieu and Igny) which will be one Community in Igny at Pentecost 2008. The future superior of this Community, M. Inès, the former abbess of El Encuentro was present to explain the project which had been developed for more than two years by Dom Olivier of Citeaux, Dom Patrick of Sept-Fons, Dom Antonio of Olenburg, Dom Guillaume of Mont de Cats, Dom Jean-Marc of Acey and Mother Danièle of the Abbot General's Council. Mother Inès was insistent that it was a project for the life of the Nuns. Another question for the Plenary Council concerned the Community of Saint Sauveur who after having decided to separate from the order, now asked to be re-integrated. Finally, we spoke of another delicate topic, that of Maria Zvijezda in Bosnia.

We also met with the Central Secretary of Formation, Sister Pamela Clinton, who is preparing a meeting of all the Regional Secretaries of Formation in June of 2008. At the meeting they will seek ways to apply the Ratio to the real situations of persons who now ask to enter our communities. Frequently these candidates suffer from deep psychic wounds. One of the

important points in formation is to look for ways to discover the grace of humility and obedience for persons who have been victimized by their life experience; how to assist all our Brothers and Sisters to run with hearts expanded the way of the Divine commands.

The remainder of our activity was devoted to the work of preparing the next Mixed General Meeting. This work began with the communication that was not very encouraging: the Congregation for Religious had responded negatively to the two presentations of the three requests that were made after the Chapter of 2005. These concerned the possibility of having one General Chapter; the possibility of a non-priest abbot; of a similar discipline regarding the Enclosure for the monks and nuns.

For the rest, our votes were in the direction of integrating the Regions in the pastoral work of the MGM regarding the House Reports. These will be studied first in the Regions and will be the object of a report on the particular position of every community and on the characteristic traits of the Region. For this study, the Regions can consult the Visitation Cards and speak with the Father Immediates. During the discussion of this, we were very sensitive to the reality that it can be very delicate in certain Regions to propose that certain Reports be given to the Mixed Commission of the MGM for a more profound study. For this reason we very favorably welcomed the suggestion of leaving to the Mixed Commissions the choice of the reports that should be studied further. Certainly a Superior or a Father Immediate always can take the initiative and ask that a Mixed Commission examine the report of his/her House or of his daughter house.

After a discussion among the members of the Central Commission, we thought that it would be good to retain the Liaison Commission which functioned at the last MGM and improve the efficiency of its functioning. The Abbot General and the Commission of Coordination appreciated the work of this commission.

The document, *The House Reports and their Treatment at the MGM* was re-written by a commission composed of Dom Armand, Mother Mary of Glencarin and Dom Anastasius of Lantao. This new presentation was accepted without reservation. This was an occasion for us to sense the importance of the problem of languages in our Order. In the same linguistic era the words do not always have the same meaning!

At the MGM a document will be composed on the State of the Order which will take into account the House Reports, the Reports of the Regions and the work of the Mixed Commissions. A commission of three Capitulants will be elected for this project.

For the remainder, we will have to continue the reflection on the structures of the Order, a point that will be put on the program of the next MGM, according to the extraordinary procedure, that is to say a work for all the Mixed Commissions. The Law Commission will prepare a working paper on the topic. The Regions will be invited to deepen their reflection on this fundamental theme of the structures and their place in the life of the Order. Also at this MGM, we will initiate a study on the possibility of establishing a juridical bond between a monastery of Nuns and its foundation at the moment of autonomy.

Concerning the election of the Abbot General, we must take up again a reflection on his role, beginning with the document prepared in 1974 at the time of the election of Dom Ambrose, the Constitutions on the Abbot General and the letter of Dom Bernardo of January 26 of this year. This election will be preceded by a reflection at the level of the Mixed Commissions which will present to the general assembly a list of candidates and the motives for their choice with “discretion and charity”.

At the next MGM a reflection will be initiated on the role of the Superior with the purpose of drawing up a pastoral document. This reflection should be based on the letter of the Abbot General addressed to the Spanish Region in 1993, on the conference given at the Region of the Isles in 2007 by Dom Timothy and on the work in the Regions on this topic.

In addition, we accepted to examine the request presented by the Community of Bernardine Nuns of G ronde to be incorporated into our Order.

Finally, we encouraged the Regions to continue their reflection on the place of work in our life. The theme will be placed on the program of a future MGM.

Our next MGM will be important, since this will be a meeting during which a new Abbot General will be elected, but also because of the particular themes that will be treated which concern the structures of the Order and the role of the Superiors. At another level, it also will be important because of relating the functioning of the Regions to the work of the Mixed Commissions.

In His great mercy, may the Lord help us to complete the work thus begun.

By request of the Central Commissions,
Dom Jacques Bri re
President of REM

Introduction

The Abbot General opened the meeting: "Welcome to everyone, in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit."

M. Danièle extended a special greeting to M. Inès, superior *ad nutum* of the community of Belval, and designated superior of the community which will be formed by the amalgamation of three communities: Igny, La Grâce-Dieu, and Belval. M. Inès is here for the day to give us some information on this project. During the meeting Sr Pamela, Central Secretary for Formation, will also be with us for a few days.

According to ST 80.J of our Constitutions, "When in session the Central Commission of Abbots and the Central Commission of Abbesses acts as the plenary council of the Abbot General, who consults it in the cases mentioned in ST 84.1.C."

Procedure for this meeting

The procedure for this meeting is that which was voted on by the Central Commissions at Orval in 1995, because we are functioning as two Central Commissions, despite the vote taken at the MGM 2005. The Abbot General is going to explain the reason for this to us.

The work of the Central Commissions is:

- to co-ordinate the suggestions of the regional conferences; for this, a dossier has been given to each participant;
- to establish the programme of the Mixed General Meeting of 2008 (MGM);
- to decide how the points on the programme will be prepared before the MGM, and to assign them a suitable procedure for treatment at the MGM;

[**Simplified** procedure: points are immediately put to the vote without preliminary study in the Commissions and without debate in the plenary assembly. A study of the question is sent to the capitulants before the opening of the meeting, with the exact formulation of the vote(s) that will be taken.

Ordinary procedure: the question is studied by four Commissions.

Extraordinary procedure: the question is studied by all the Commissions.]

- to plan the practical organisation of the MGM.

The goal of the discussions is to clarify the points in such a way that their preparation before the MGM and their presentation at the MGM itself will be understood by all.

All the participants in this meeting have received a dossier which combines the votes taken by the Regional meetings on different points. This dossier will serve as the basis for our discussions.

It is not for the Central Commissions to resolve the questions which will be treated at the MGM or at the General Chapters (GC), but to decide whether or not to put them on the programme of these meetings.

I. PREPARATION OF THE MGM

1. ELECTION OF THE ABBOT GENERAL

1.1 Calendar

The proposal of REM that the vote concerning the eventual resignation of the Abbot General be taken in the first days of the MGM seems reasonable, since this conditions the rest of the programme of the Meeting.

REMILA suggested that the election take place on Sept. 8th, feast of the Birth of Our Lady, and anniversary of the election of Dom Bernardo.

1.2 Who may be elected?

C. 83.1 says, *"The Abbot General is elected by the General Chapters of both monks and nuns in separate sessions. Whoever obtains an absolute majority in both Chapters is considered to be elected. Election is for an unrestricted term. Confirmation is not needed. To be eligible, he must be or have been an abbot in the Order."*

Following the proposals of several Regions that a titular prior might be elected, the Abbot General, Dom Bernardo, asked the Law Commission to study this point. M. Danièle read the response of the Law Commission (cf. Annexe II). The Law Commission's conclusion is that the text of C. 83.1 is clear: only someone who is or who has been an **abbot** may be elected. But the General Chapters could always ask for a modification of this Constitution.

Five Regions thought it would be possible to interpret the word "abbot" broadly, to include all major superiors, that is titular priors and superiors *ad nutum*. But it is important to distinguish between what is judged desirable and what is permitted by the Constitutions. Given the present position of the Congregation, it does not seem opportune at the moment to request to modify C. 83.1. This Constitution also includes the point about the duration of the mandate of the Abbot General, which several Regions wished to be for a determined period.

VOTE 1: GIVEN THE INFORMATION PROVIDED BY THE ABBOT GENERAL CONCERNING A LETTER OF THE CARDINAL PREFECT CONCERNING THE NEXT ELECTION OF THE ABBOT GENERAL, WE CONSIDER IT APPROPRIATE NOT TO MODIFY C 83 IN REGARD TO THE TERM OF OFFICE OF THE ABBOT GENERAL AND THE CONDITION FOR BEING ELECTED TO THIS OFFICE.

YES 24 NO 1 ABS 0

Proposition accepted

1.3 Role of the Abbot General

The General Chapter of Abbots of 1974 drew up a "Statute on the Abbot General". In spite of the evolution of the Order since that time, this text could help our reflection (CNE). This reflection should be carried out principally in the Regions, but also in the Mixed Commissions (ORIENS). Given that some Regions cannot have meetings before the MGM, we should plan that there be time, at the beginning of the MGM, for Regional meetings. In them, rather than drawing up an "identikit profile" of the future Abbot General, listing the desirable qualities, it would be important in the first place to take into account the real situation of the Order (REI, RAFMA). Dom Bernardo, in his letter to the superiors of January 2007 also gave some pointers.

1.4 Long-term and immediate preparation

Several Regions proposed having "nominations" (REM, RAFMA, NED, CNE...) although others are not in favour of this (RéCiF, RE, CAN). The word "candidate" is ambiguous, it has political overtones; it is preferable to speak of "ones likely to be elected". It is a different matter than other elections which take place during the MGM (members of *ad hoc* Commissions; people capable of studying or drawing up a text to present to the assembly, etc.). It is not a matter of putting forward candidates (RE), but of having some information about the people and to help the new superiors who do not know the abbots (NED) rather than having "rumours circulating in the corridors". This work could be done in Regions or in Mixed Commissions, with sharing on the criteria of discernment (USA, ORIENS), followed by reporting back to the full assembly (CNE).

CNE envisaged the possibility of a straw vote (without giving the number of votes received by each person), to have an idea of possible names.

VOTE 2: IN ORDER TO PREPARE FOR THE ELECTION OF THE ABBOT GENERAL, WE WOULD LIKE A REFLECTION ON THE ROLE OF THE ABBOT GENERAL, STARTING FROM THE 1974 DOCUMENT (SEE APPENDIX 7 OF THE REPORT OF THE GENERAL CHAPTER), THE CONSTITUTIONS, AND THE LETTER OF THE ABBOT GENERAL OF JANUARY 26, 2007.

YES 23 NO 1 ABS 1 **Proposition accepted**

VOTE 3: WE WOULD LIKE THAT THESE THREE DOCUMENTS BE INCLUDED IN THE GENERAL BOOKLET.

YES 22 NO 1 ABS 1 **Proposition accepted**

VOTE 4: WE WOULD LIKE CRITERIA OF DISCERNMENT TO BE DRAWN UP BY THE CENTRAL COMMISSIONS.

YES 4 NO 18 ABS 2 Proposition rejected

VOTE 5: WE WOULD LIKE SOME CAPITALINTS TO GIVE PRESENTATIONS AT THE MGM ON THE EXPECTATIONS AND NEEDS OF THE ORDER.

YES 11 NO 12 ABS 2 Proposition rejected

VOTE 6: AT THE BEGINNING OF THE MGM, WE WOULD LIKE THE ELECTION OF THE ABBOT GENERAL TO BE PREPARED

[at the level of the regions: YES 2 NO 21 ABS 2 Proposition rejected]

AT THE LEVEL OF THE MIXED COMMISSIONS.

YES 23 NO 1 ABS 1 **Proposition accepted**

VOTE 7: WE WOULD LIKE THAT THE THREE DOCUMENTS (MENTIONED IN VOTE 2) BE THE OBJECT OF DISCUSSION BY A PANEL (OF THREE PERSONS) WHICH WOULD BE FOLLOWED BY EXCHANGES IN MIXED COMMISSIONS, ACCORDING TO THE PRECEDING VOTE.

YES 4 NO 19 ABS 1 Proposition rejected

VOTE 8: WE WOULD LIKE THE MIXED COMMISSIONS TO PRESENT A LIST OF CANDIDATES IN PLENARY ASSEMBLY, GIVING THE REASONS FOR THEIR CHOICE WITH DISCRETION AND CHARITY.

YES 19 NO 4 ABS 2 **Proposition accepted**

VOTE 9: WE WOULD LIKE THAT, AFTER THE REPORTS OF THE MIXED COMMISSIONS IN PLENARY ASSEMBLY, A PAPER BE WRITTEN WHICH WOULD PICK OUT SOME TRENDS.

YES 11 NO 13 ABS 0 Proposition rejected

1.5 Spiritual preparation

Propositions had been made by several Regions, particularly about the day before the election, which could be a day of fasting and prayer. A member of RéCiF outlined a detailed scenario. NED found this somewhat artificial, and the Region of the Isles insisted that there should be sufficient time for reflection and prayer, in union with all the members of the Order.

VOTE 10: WE WOULD LIKE A PREACHER FROM OUTSIDE THE ORDER TO GIVE A SPIRITUAL CONFERENCE ON THE RESPONSIBILITY OF CAPITULANTS AT THE TIME OF THE ELECTION OF AN ABBOT GENERAL.

YES 2 NO 23 ABS 0 Proposition rejected

VOTE 11: WE LEAVE IT TO THE CO-ORDINATING COMMISSION TO WORK OUT THE DETAILS OF THE SPIRITUAL PREPARATION OF THE ELECTION.

YES 23 NO 0 ABS 2 **Proposition accepted**

To sum up:

- 1. The General Booklet sent to the capitulants before the MGM will contain: the document of 1974 (cf. Annexe 7 of the minutes of the General Chapter), Constitutions 82 to 86, and the letter of the Abbot General of 26 January 2007.*
- 2. The election will be prepared, at the beginning of the MGM, at the level of the Mixed Commissions, which will present a list of candidates in plenary session, giving reasons for their choice with discretion and charity.*

2. HOUSE REPORTS

Early in the discussion on the treatment of the house reports at the MGM it was suggested that merely revising the existing Procedure, "The House Reports and their Treatment at the MGM", would not be very helpful.

- Over the last nine years the Procedure has been modified and improved, but the resulting text is complex, not always clear, and not always well understood. If we add more to it, it will become burdensome and impractical.
- Rather than making the text longer, perhaps some explanations about the functioning of the Mixed Commissions could be given to the Presidents as soon as they are elected at the beginning of the MGM, especially for those fulfilling the role of President for the first time.
- Or, instead of adding everything to the Procedure, some things could be set aside at the level of counsels.
- Perhaps there could be a *vade mecum* for the Mixed Commissions, with all the practical points in it, a kind of check-list for quick consultation so that they can see if they have followed all the steps.

Votes were taken:

VOTE 12: WE WISH TO HAVE A NEW EDITION OF THE PROCEDURE *THE HOUSE REPORTS AND THEIR TREATMENT AT THE MGM*, WHICH WOULD DELINEATE IN A CLEAR WAY THE DIFFERENT STAGES OF THE PROCEDURE: THE WRITING AND STUDY OF THE REPORTS, ADVICE AND DECISIONS, INFORMATION, RECOURSE AND FOLLOW-UP.

YES 23 NO 2 ABS 0 **Proposition accepted**

VOTE 13: WE ENTRUST THE REVISION OF THIS DOCUMENT TO AN *AD HOC* COMMISSION (CF. NO. 10a OF THE PROCEDURE FOR THE CENTRAL COMMISSIONS).

YES 22 NO 1 ABS 2 **Proposition accepted**

Elected to this *ad hoc* Commission were:

First ballot	Dom Armand	20 votes
Second ballot	M. Marie	18 votes
Fourth ballot	Dom Anastasius	22 votes

The Commission drew up a new edition of "The House Reports and their Treatment at the MGM", and a supplementary "Practical Guide" (see Annexe I), in the light of the following discussions.

2.1: Writing the House Reports

REI had proposed:

- that a grille outline be formulated to assist the writing of the next house reports.
The questions suggested in the Procedure of 2004 have been incorporated into the new Procedure.
- that the house reports be prepared by the community and not by the superior alone; REI found the phrase "draws up the report" in the existing Procedure ambiguous, and wanted to indicate that the community participates in an active way.
The new Procedure says "It is written by the community with its Superior". The actual practice may vary from one community to another, e.g. after community dialogues a small group may be charged with drawing up a text which is then voted on by the community; or a superior may write the text after hearing the community, and then ask their opinion of it. There is no question of the superior alone drawing up the house report. Those studying the house report may ask how the document was drawn up.
- REI had also proposed that, before sending the report to Rome, it be submitted to the Father Immediate who could ask for modifications in it. Some Commissions have spent much time on a house report before becoming aware of other problems not mentioned in it.
CNE asked that if a Father Immediate considers that an important problem is not mentioned in the report, that, at the beginning of the MGM he inform the President of the Mixed Commission which will study that report. Between drawing up the house report and the MGM there is a lapse of time in which a situation can evolve.
The new Procedure retains the former text, "It is written... in consultation with the Father Immediate", i.e. he may suggest modifications, but not impose them. However, a Father Immediate may draw the attention of those studying the house report to some aspects of the life of the community not mentioned in the report, if he judges it useful or necessary (cf. the Practical Guide, par. 2).

2.2: Role of the Regions in the study of the House Reports

REI had proposed that at the MGM the Regions study the reports of the houses of their Region; REM asked that the pastoral work of the Regions be coordinated with the work of the Mixed Commissions, and that the Mixed Commissions become places to verify and deepen the pastoral work of the Regions; and REMILA requested that the Regions function in a complementary manner in relation to the Mixed Commissions.

Concerning the possibility of each Region studying the house reports of the houses in that Region, the following points were made:

- The method of studying the house reports has changed over time. At one time the visitation cards were read. When we were working on the Constitutions, only a certain number of reports were read. Later, we decided to read all of them, but perhaps that has become too much. The present way of doing things need not be permanent, maybe it is time for something new.
- The question of the Regions will have to be taken up by the Chapters, sooner or later. This is a possible starting point.
- The Regions have an advantage in knowing the houses being studied and in understanding the background and local situation.
- Members of a Region sometimes have studied the house reports at Regional meetings. With the groundwork already done, there would be fewer points to be investigated at the MGM. It would mean more work for the Regions, but less for the MGM.
- Members of a Region usually share the same language. It is important that the language of a community be understood by those studying its house report.
- It would provide good continuity in the houses studied.
- A Region will be able to see that certain situations need more care, and to provide care between Chapters.
- If the Regions are obliged to enter into this process, it will help them to evolve in their vision and pastoral work. It will change the dynamics in the Region afterwards, e.g. where pastoral sharing in Regions has up to now been optional, or where big problems are not mentioned at Regional level.
- It would help to cut down on the absences of members from Mixed Commission meetings, because the superiors would all be present and not have to go to another Commission when their own house report was being studied.
- Larger Regions or ones which use more than one language, e.g. ORIENS and RAFMA, could divide into two sub-groups.

On the other hand,

- Capitulants would not be informed about houses outside their own Region, and would not be able to participate in the pastoral care of the Chapters for all the communities.
- A richness of the MGM is interaction with communities from other Regions; losing this would be an impoverishment.
- The Mixed Commissions have the advantage of diversity of members with broader experience.
- A bond is formed amongst those in a Mixed Commission even if they are not from the same Region.
- It is necessary for the good functioning of the Commissions that its members speak the same language. But there could be more mixing, between peoples of the same language but different cultures. Or someone who is fluent in more than one language could be assigned to a group which uses a language other than his/her mother tongue.
- This new role envisaged for the Regions presupposes that they have been at work already before the MGM. But different Regions function in different ways. Some meet less frequently than others, and the houses can be separated by much greater distances. Some Regional conferences have a good deal of pastoral experience, and have cultivated confidence in this area. Others have very little experience. There are different realities, and the same norm could not be applied to all.

A further suggestion was made: to have a meeting of the Regions on the first day of the MGM, at which they would decide which house reports from their Region should be studied in more depth by the Mixed Commissions.

- Often the Commissions start from zero with a house report. It would be useful for the Regions to pass on their information and reflections to a Commission, so that they would know from the beginning what to focus on.

- It would also save a lot of time; all the house reports would not have to be studied by the Mixed Commissions.
- It would be a way of giving official recognition to the pastoral work already done at Regional level.

But

- The idea of the Regions selecting the reports to be read at the MGM is narrow. It is good for the Order as a whole to have a global vision, knowing the positives as well as the problem situations.
- The Regions would need access to the Visitation cards to understand specific situations.
- The first source of pastoral care for a community is the Father Immediate. Where does he fit in this plan, especially when he is from another Region? It is not clear how all the pastoral organs fit together.
- The Regions would have to be given a lot of pastoral authority; they would also have to accept this authority, and not shirk it. Would all Regions be able to function in this way?

At this point, the following votes were taken:

VOTE 14: IN ORDER TO RESPOND TO THE WISHES OF SOME REGIONS WHO WANT TO CO-ORDINATE THEIR PASTORAL WORK WITH THAT OF THE MIXED COMMISSIONS, WE PROPOSE THAT FROM THE MGM OF 2008, IN THEIR STUDY OF THE HOUSE REPORTS, THE REGIONS BE GIVEN A MORE EFFECTIVE PASTORAL ROLE IN MAKING INTERVENTIONS.

YES 13 NO 11 ABS 1

Proposition accepted

VOTE 15: THE INTERVENTION OF THE REGIONS COULD TAKE THE FOLLOWING FORM:

a: THE REGION WOULD DRAW UP A GLOBAL REPORT PRESENTING THE SITUATION OF EACH OF THE HOUSES.

YES 13 NO 11 (1 null)

Proposition accepted

b: THE REGION WOULD CHOOSE SOME REPORTS FOR STUDY BY THE MIXED COMMISSIONS.

YES 15 NO 9 (1 null)

Proposition accepted

(but see below)

VOTE 16: IN ORDER TO PERFORM THIS TASK, AS WELL AS HAVING THE INFORMATION PROVIDED BY THE HOUSE REPORTS, THE REGION COULD

A: CONSULT THE VISITATION CARDS.

YES 17 NO 6 ABS 2

Proposition accepted

B: CONSULT THE FATHERS IMMEDIATE.

YES 19 NO 3 ABS 3

Proposition accepted

However, when a draft text based on these votes was discussed later, several problems and inconsistencies were noted:

- The nature of the Regional report was unclear, whether it was to be an overall view of the Region or to be concerned with individual houses; or even whether there should be two reports, one of each kind.
- The nature of the treatment of the house reports was not clear: whether it was to be a less detailed "reading" or a more thorough "study".
- If each Region analyses each house report with the same attention as the Mixed Commissions, the whole of the MGM will consist of meetings of Regions.
- The mode of selecting the houses for further study was not clear; this is a very delicate choice needing discernment and discretion.

Through discussion, a further suggestion emerged: that once the house reports were read in the Regional groups and an overall report on the Region drawn up, that the Mixed Commissions (rather than the Regions) would choose which reports to study. A number of house reports would be assigned to each Commission, as before, by the Abbot General and his Council, and in the light of the Regional reports given to them, they would choose which house reports to study.

- This would mean that all the house reports are laid before the MGM, as before.
- It would integrate the work of the Regions without making the work of the Mixed Commissions superfluous.
- It would allow for more viewpoints and cultural perspectives to be taken into account when choosing the reports to be studied, not just the limited perspective of one Region.

The Regional work would be preparatory, a reading of the reports, together with the Visitation cards if necessary, to draw up a report of the Region. These Regional reports would be given to all the capitulants (NB: time would be needed for their translation before the work of the Mixed Commissions could begin).

The work would then move to the Mixed Commissions, each one choosing which house reports to study in the light of what is said in the Regional reports.

Some "straw votes" were taken to give the *ad hoc* Commission some directions for re-writing the text:

1. From the house reports assigned to them by the Abbot General and his council, the Mixed Commissions will choose which house reports they will study.

YES: 22 NO: 1 ABS: 2

2. In choosing the house reports to be studied, the Mixed Commission takes into account the Regional reports and/or requests made by a superior or Father Immediate.

YES: 25 (unanimous)

3. The Regional reports will include a brief presentation of each community and give a general overview of the Region with its special characteristics.

YES: 25 (unanimous)

The final version of the new edition of the Procedure [cf. Annexe I (a)] takes these orientations into account.

NB: Vote 15 above is superseded by Vote 26 below.

2.3 Treatment of the House Reports by the Mixed Commissions

2.3.1 Composition of the Mixed Commissions

The Region of the Isles asked that new Mixed Commissions be established, to have more variety and to study different house reports. USA suggested that the members of the Mixed Commissions be changed every third MGM beginning with the 2008 MGM, for the sake of greater exposure and fresher input. Neither Region offered criteria for the establishment of these new Commissions.

- Establishing the Mixed Commissions is a very big task for the Abbot General's Council.
- The extent to which changes can be made is restricted by language limitations, particularly for the Dutch-speaking Commission.
- Another possibility would be to retain the same Mixed Commissions but assign them different house reports.
- At every MGM there are many new superiors. This automatically changes the composition of the Mixed Commissions, bringing fresh insights and new voices.
- Some appreciate being able to stay in the same Commission and study the same reports, following up the evolution of the community situations.

VOTE 17: WE WISH TO HAVE A NEW COMPOSITION OF THE MIXED COMMISSIONS, INSOFAR AS POSSIBLE.

YES 10

NO 7

ABS 8

Proposition accepted

2.3.2 Absences from the Mixed Commissions

ORIENS requested that absences from the Mixed Commissions be reduced. It is understandable that a superior is called to another Commission when his / her own house report is being studied, but perhaps Fathers Immediate are called away from their Mixed Commission too often? This means a lot of movement and slows the work of the Commissions. Could some guidelines be established to improve the way the Mixed Commissions work?

- Perhaps a Commission could study the house reports of the houses in the Commission. It would offer more pastoral possibilities and mean less movement between Commissions.
- Sometimes a superior or a Father Immediate is called to another Commission only to be told that everything is fine. Is this worthwhile?
- But the presence of the superior makes a report come alive. We don't always know what is happening in a community just by reading its house report; it is in discussion that things emerge.
- We would not want to cut out the possibility of having a Father Immediate present from a different Commission.
- Some Commissions always call the Father Immediate, although they are not required to. Perhaps the President of a Mixed Commission could ask him at the beginning of the MGM if he thinks his presence would be useful.
- Or the Father Immediate could take the initiative in saying that it would be good for him to attend the Commission, if he thinks there is a problem in a community which is not reflected in its house report.

The reading of the house reports in Regional groups will help to some extent to cut down on absences from the Mixed Commissions.

The concerns about the presence of the Father Immediate are taken into account in the "Practical Guide", par. 2.

2.3.3 Authority of the Mixed Commissions

CAN, CNE and ORIENS asked that the Central Commissions improve and define the manner of functioning of the Mixed Commissions. USA and CAN asked that the specific authority delegated to the Mixed Commissions and the specific authority maintained by the

MGM be made precise. REI asked that the power of decision remain with the General Chapters, and that the Commissions present their propositions concerning the houses to the Chapters.

- In REI, some felt that we need to reinforce the decisions of some Mixed Commissions by something coming from the plenary assembly.
- Perhaps the problem the last time was that not enough information came back to the plenary assembly. The authority of the Mixed Commissions was delegated by the MGM, and the one who delegates has the right to be informed about what is done with that authority.
- § 2.1 of the (2004) Procedure says that all authority is delegated to the Mixed Commissions except what is reserved to the General Chapter according to C. 79. But many are not clear about what decisions can be made and imposed. There are grey areas, and clarification is needed.
- The Mixed Commissions have always had pastoral responsibility, delegated to them by the MGM. What was new the last time was that it explicitly included the authority to impose decisions if necessary.

In connection with this, USA asked that the Central Commissions clarify the expressions "suggestion", "counsel", "decision", "recommendation", as they are used in "The House Reports and their Treatment at the MGM". Other regions also mentioned that these terms are not understood in the same way by everyone.

- It seems clear that a decision is very definite and closes other options. A recommendation or a suggestion is not a decision.
- Since the last MGM we have given the Mixed Commissions power sometimes to require certain things; people are obliged to act if certain decisions are made. In these cases we have to be very clear what we mean. In other cases, where there is no obligation, there can be variety of language.
- Capitulants use languages other than the three official languages of the MGM, including non-European languages. They need to be clear about the exact meaning of the words used, because words can convey different meanings in different cultures.

No votes were taken on this topic, but the concerns are reflected in the revised edition of "The House Reports and their Treatment at the MGM".

2.3.4 Feedback and Follow-up

Feedback to individual superiors

USA asked that all the persons implicated in the house report be present, as far as possible, for the conclusions of the work of the Commission. It was clarified that this meant the superior and the Father Immediate of the house concerned.

- This request arose from a particular situation in the 2005 MGM, in which the superior and Father Immediate felt that they were not sufficiently or appropriately informed about the decisions of a Mixed Commission.

CNE stated that whenever a Mixed Commission makes a decision, it should be communicated several days before the end of the MGM so that recourse is possible.

These points have been taken into account in the "Practical Guide".

Feedback to the plenary assembly

NED asked that a clear procedure be established for feedback from the Mixed Commissions to the plenary assembly; CNE suggested that the Mixed Commissions give a brief report on their work to the full assembly each week.

This feedback will be given through the Liaison Commission – see 2.4 below.

Follow-up

REI said it would like to be assured that the decisions taken by the Mixed Commissions are followed. In some cases the Commissions never knew what happened to the decisions / recommendations etc that they had made. Sometimes the results were different from what was intended. It would be good to know what happens later.

- The Mixed Commissions do not exist after the Chapters; their work ends with the closure of the MGM. Where follow-up is needed, they entrust the work to someone else.
- Details of all the missions given by the Mixed Commissions should be put in writing, e.g. if someone is nominated to make a special visitation, the scope and limits of his authority, the length of the mandate, to whom he should report, etc, should be written down clearly. This will help eliminate confusion and possible conflict with the Father Immediate.

2.4 Liaison Commission

The Liaison Commission existed for the first time at the MGM of 2005. USA asked that its functioning and effectiveness be evaluated. RE had also made a number of proposals in relation to the continuation of the Liaison Commission and its better functioning.

- The Abbot General said that he found the work of the Commission very helpful. It enabled him to know how the work of the various Commissions was progressing. Formerly he had to go around and collect this information himself.
- Dom Timothy (a member of the Commission in 2005) described the work of the Commission as that of a messenger service: gathering information, putting it in order, sharing it with the Abbot General and the Coordinating Commission. It has a very practical function.
- There was some difficulty last time in getting the information from the Mixed Commissions. People were hesitant to give information because they did not fully understand why it was needed. The secretaries of the Mixed Commissions understood that they were to report directly to the Coordinating Commission.
- The work of the Liaison Commission related only to the study of the house reports. It was not involved in the other work of the MGM.
- Someone wondered if the work of the Liaison Commission could be done by people other than capitulants, as it seems to be of a secretarial nature, concerned with passing on information. But the nature of the information seems to require that it be put into the hands of members of the MGM.
- Three people is a suitable number. They should, as far as possible, have ability in the major languages of the MGM. But pastoral sensitivity and experience might be more important than language skills.
- It was an advantage that a member of the Abbot General's Council was on the Commission the last time.
- A written record of the work of the Liaison Commission should be kept, in a suitable form, for the archives of the Generalate. Also, the secretaries of the Mixed Commissions could give all their documentation to the Liaison Commission, so that there is a written record after the MGM.
- At the last MGM the Liaison Commission gave a résumé to the plenary assembly of all the work done by the Mixed Commissions. Some felt that more detail could have been given.
- Such a report is possible only at the end of the MGM. Could progress reports be given also, at intervals during the Meeting?

VOTE 18: WE WISH TO RETAIN THE LIAISON COMMISSION.
YES 25 (unanimous) **Proposition accepted**

VOTE 19: WE WOULD LIKE ITS JOB DESCRIPTION TO BE CLEARLY DEFINED.
YES 25 (unanimous) **Proposition accepted**

Election of the members of the Liaison Commission

First ballot	Dom Timothy	21 votes
Third ballot	M Cecilia	14 votes
Fifth ballot	M Rosaria	18 votes

The other points mentioned on this topic have been incorporated into the new edition of "The House Reports and their Treatment at the MGM" and the "Practical Guide".

2.5 "State of the Order" document

Several Regions expressed the desire to maintain a report on the State of the Order. Many asked that the Commission elected to write this report be more truly representative of the Order as a whole. REMILA requested that all the work of the Mixed Commissions, not just their study of the house reports, be incorporated into the document. USA suggested that the document be drawn up after the MGM, while RE asked that it be done during the meeting.

- Drawing up the report on the State of the Order after the MGM would give the Mixed Commissions more time for their work, especially on the house reports. Last time they felt under pressure to complete their work for this report. Also, a lot of time is giving to discussing the "State of the Order" in the aula, and this time could be more profitably used on the house reports themselves. The MGM could assign someone to compose this report, and it would not have to be approved by the assembly.
- Some years ago a similar report was made after the MGM. But a document which is sent around to the communities several months after the end of the Meeting is out-of-date, has lost its freshness. Also, it is not possible to give a reaction to such a paper.
- If the Mixed Commissions deal only with selected house reports, this will necessarily change the nature, effectiveness and meaning of the State of the Order report. But this could be balanced by taking account also of the Regional reports.
- REMILA would like also that the outgoing Abbot General present his vision of the Order.

VOTE 20: WE WOULD LIKE THAT A REPORT ON THE STATE OF THE ORDER BE DRAWN UP.
YES 24 NO 1 ABS 0 **Proposition accepted**

VOTE 21: WE WOULD LIKE THIS DOCUMENT TO BE BASED ON THE HOUSE REPORTS, AND THE REPORTS OF THE REGIONS.
YES 25 (unanimous) **Proposition accepted**

VOTE 22: WE WOULD ALSO LIKE THIS DOCUMENT TO REFLECT ALL THE OTHER WORK OF THE MIXED COMMISSIONS.
YES 14 NO 9 ABS 1 **Proposition accepted**

VOTE 23: WE WOULD LIKE THIS REPORT ON THE STATE OF THE ORDER TO BE DRAWN UP DURING THE MGM.
YES 23 NO 1 ABS 1 **Proposition accepted**

VOTE 24: WE WOULD LIKE THE COMMISSION WHICH WILL DRAW UP THIS REPORT TO BE COMPOSED OF THREE CAPITULANTS.

YES 18 NO 6 ABS 1

Proposition accepted

(therefore the alternative vote, that it be drawn up by two capitulants and a delegate, was not taken)

VOTE 25: WE WOULD LIKE THIS COMMISSION TO BE REPRESENTATIVE OF THE ASSEMBLY, AND TO THIS END WE PROPOSE THAT A MONK WOULD FIRST BE ELECTED, THEN A NUN AND THEN A THIRD MEMBER, MONK OR NUN.

YES 24 NO 0 ABS 1

Proposition accepted

2.6 The new Procedure "The House Reports and their Treatment at the MGM" and the "Practical Guide"

The *ad hoc* Commission charged with drawing up the new Procedure (Dom Armand, president; M. Marie, secretary; Dom Anastasius) decided to provide two documents: "The House Reports and their Treatment at the MGM" which describes the process and gives general principles; and a "Practical Guide" which gives details of a practical nature to help the capitulants.

First and second drafts of these documents were presented to the Central Commissions who commented on them and asked for revisions.

The final versions (cf. Annexe I) were eventually voted on, paragraph by paragraph. All were unanimously accepted, with the exception of paragraphs 2.1.1 and 2.1.2 of "The House Reports and their Treatment..." (Result of that vote: Yes 24; No 0; Abs 1).

Finally, the overall vote was taken:

VOTE 26: WE ACCEPT THE WHOLE TEXT OF "THE HOUSE REPORTS AND THEIR TREATMENT AT THE MGM".

YES 25 (UNANIMOUS)

Proposition accepted

VOTE 27: WE ACCEPT THE WHOLE TEXT OF THE "PRACTICAL GUIDE".

YES 25 (UNANIMOUS)

Proposition accepted

These texts will be presented at the beginning of the MGM of 2008 for acceptance or rejection by the capitulants.

3. POINTS TO BE PUT ON THE PROGRAMME OF THE MGM

3.1 Structures of the Order

Two Regions asked to continue the reflection on the traditional and new structures of the Order:

REMILA desires "that the structures of the Order be reconsidered in relation to a more effective pastoral service, particularly in the context of the plurality of cultures", and that this reflection not get overlooked...

NED envisaged that the reflection would begin in the Regions and continue in the MGM of 2008.

VOTE 28: WE WOULD LIKE REFLECTION ON THE STRUCTURES OF THE ORDER TO BE CONTINUED IN THE REGIONS.

YES 19 NO 0 ABS 6

Proposition accepted

VOTE 29: WE WOULD LIKE THIS REFLECTION ON THE STRUCTURES OF THE ORDER TO BE PUT ON THE PROGRAMME OF THE MGM OF 2008.

YES 18 NO 3 ABS 4

Proposition accepted

VOTE 30: WE WOULD LIKE THIS REFLECTON TO BE STUDIED ACCORDING TO [the ordinary procedure YES 2 NO 21 ABS 2 Proposition rejected] THE EXTRAORDINARY PROCEDURE.

YES 21 NO 2 ABS 2

Proposition accepted

VOTE 31: A WORKING PAPER WILL BE DRAWN UP BY THE LAW COMMISSION.

YES 14 NO 6 ABS 5

Proposition accepted

Therefore the vote on the alternative proposition was not taken: that it be drawn up by the Central Commissions.

3.1.1 Fathers Immediate

- It is principally REMILA which had studied this point, starting from the particular situation of one community. But as this situation could recur elsewhere, it would be desirable to have a new structure, internal to a Region, for these situations.
- However, it is not good to legislate in order to find a solution for a local problem.
- The Abbot General suggested that the Central Commissions put a review of the pastoral service of Fathers Immediate on the programme of the MGM.
- At the moment the number of delegated Fathers Immediate in the Order is increasing, which is also a sign that there is a problem.

VOTE 32: WE PROPOSE THAT THE QUESTION OF THE FATHERS IMMEDIATE BE DISCUSSED IN THE FRAMEWORK OF THE STRUCTURES OF THE ORDER.

YES 24 NO 0 ABS 0

Proposition accepted

3.1.2 Central Commissions

Representation and number of members of the Central Commissions

- Here the situation is a bit messy, because we voted at the MGM of 2005 for a single Central Commission, but on account of the letter of the Cardinal Prefect we have to function as two Central Commissions.
- There is also in this single Central Commission, elected in 2005, an imbalance between monks and nuns.
- A choice was made to give a preferential option to the young churches (three Regions) and therefore they have two representatives, while the other Regions have only one. The only possible way in which to respond to the desires for both a reduction in the number of members at the meeting and to have all Regions represented, is by allowing only one representative per Region.
- However, CAN proposes that the representatives rotate, in order to reduce the number of participants. USA likewise proposed that the number of members be restricted, to allow for more effective functioning. But then one could speak about an over-centralisation of the Abbot General and his Council. REMILA explicitly asked that all Regions be represented.

VOTE 33: WE WOULD LIKE THE QUESTION OF THE COMPOSITION OF EACH OF THE TWO CENTRAL COMMISSIONS TO BE PUT ON THE PROGRAMME OF THE MGM OF 2008.

YES 24 NO 0 ABS 1 **Proposition accepted**

VOTE 34: WE WOULD LIKE THIS QUESTION TO BE DEALT WITH

[by ordinary procedure YES 4 NO 20 ABS 1 Proposition rejected]
BY EXTRAORDINARY PROCEDURE.

YES 22 NO 1 ABS 2 **Proposition accepted**

The meeting of the Central Commissions

These are the principal ideas which were expressed by the participants:

- According to the Constitutions, the Central Commissions prepare the General Chapters by co-ordinating the initiatives coming from the regional conferences. These initiatives are presented by way of votes taken at the Regional meetings. But other propositions could have been made without being the object of a vote.
- The Central Commissions choose (by voting) between the various propositions of the Regions. All that is on the programme of the Central Commission meeting does not automatically go to the MGM.
- So the Central Commissions already exercise a certain creativity in modifying the propositions of the Regions, or in rejecting them. But REMILA asked for more creativity, by taking into account the reflection which underlies the votes, as well as the lived experience of the communities.
- As long as the Central Commissions have existed there has been the desire, expressed here and there, that they be more than just an organ of preparation of the General Chapters, but that they be also a place of reflection on the life of the communities.
- Many other themes are studied in Regional meetings which are not the object of votes. A superior does not always have the time to read all the reports of the meetings. The Central Commissions could begin by asking each one to give a presentation about these subjects.

VOTE 35: WE SUGGEST THAT IN ORDER TO ALLOW THE CENTRAL COMMISSIONS TO PERFORM THEIR TASK IN A MORE CREATIVE WAY, IN THE SETTING UP OF THE MGM THEY NOT BE LIMITED TO THE VOTES OF THE REGIONAL CONFERENCES.

YES 23 NO 1 ABS 1 **Proposition accepted**

VOTE 36: IN ORDER TO DO THIS, AT THE BEGINNING OF THEIR MEETING, THE MEMBERS OF THE CENTRAL COMMISSIONS COULD GIVE SUFFICIENT TIME TO IDENTIFYING AND DEEPENING THE PRINCIPAL THEMES THAT THE REGIONS HAVE FACED.

YES 21 NO 1 ABS 3 **Proposition accepted**

3.1.2 Regions

- Three Regions (REM, REI and REMILA) had taken votes on the pastoral role which the Regions should have.
- The reflection in REM was based on a paper of M. Monica (cf. REM minutes 2007). The pastoral work of the Mixed Commissions of the MGM is sometimes difficult because of a lack of knowledge of the communities. It is easier at the level of the Regions.
- Pastoral work is already happening in the USA and CAN Regions, where they try to resolve problems without necessarily bringing them to the MGM.

- There is also the example of what was done in France for five communities (cf. Annexe III). And this local pastoral work is being presented at this meeting to make it official. The final decision always belongs to the General Chapters.
- REM voted explicitly that this pastoral work be recognised. Does that mean giving the Regions the power to make decisions? or is it simply that they would encourage, that they would motivate the Father Immediate, for example take steps towards the resignation of a superior?
- The role of the Fathers Immediate has changed a lot. It is no longer a matter of making a Visit once a year, but a service of accompaniment for a local superior and the community. Must this service belong only to the Father Immediate, or could it also belong to the Region?
- REMILA envisages that the President of the Region could be a real instrument in communicating a situation to the MGM, always having first consulted the Father Immediate concerned.
- It is this interrelationship between the role of the Region and that of the Father Immediate which is not easy to put in place. In the European Regions, the Father Immediate, even if he does not belong to the same Region, is nearby, while for other Regions, he is sometimes very far away.
- The Charter of Charity sees this mutual aid as a gospel obligation. But we must avoid the Father Immediate perceiving this role of the Region as an intrusion and feeling that he is personally ignored.
- At the moment the Regions do not have pastoral authority; it would be necessary for the MGM to give it to them, specifying its limits and conditions.
- It is a basic principle that law follows life. At first, as was said in our Constitutions, the Regional conferences had only informal and free meetings of superiors, and helped the Central Commissions to prepare the MGM. Life has evolved, and if we wish to recognise officially that the Regions have another role, it should be said in the Constitutions that they are the normal place in which this or that takes place.
- It is not easy to combine the authority of the Father Immediate with the autonomy of the communities and the pastoral role – or the power – of the Regions.
- The situation of the Regions differs greatly from one to another. To create a new juridical structure (if we are speaking of authority) at this level is undesirable.
- The situation of the ORIENS Region is difficult. They are still in a situation where three very different groups are getting to know each other. The common language is English, which is not the local language of most of the communities. We are not yet at the point where we can talk about how to give each other mutual help.
- For RAFMA the problem is equally great, given that the distances between the houses are enormous. Languages and customs are different. It would be very difficult to resolve the problems of a community in the Region, because we do not know the communities.
- The Region of the Isles has opted to have the same structures as the RE, but some communities fear an evolution towards the structure of a "province". However, pastoral sharing between superiors functions well.
- In REI there is a good use of subsidiarity. When there is a difficulty, it is normally resolved with the Father Immediate; if that is not possible, there is recourse to the Region; and if that is not sufficient the problem is brought to the Abbot General or to the MGM. When we say "Region", perhaps that could mean a more limited sub-group of the whole Region. It would be enough to say that the Region is the place to resolve problems which cannot be sorted out with the Father Immediate.
- We need to distinguish between the pastoral role of the Region and the authority which might be given to it.

- There is evolution going on in all the Regions, but according to different rhythms. The Abbot General suggested putting an evaluation of C.81 concerning the Regional Conferences on the programme of the Chapters, to see if the text needs to be updated or if we should wait. The request of REMILA that the Regions be recognised as "valid interlocutors" could be the object of a new Statute of C. 81, without being obligatory for all Regions. C. 74 on the Father Immediate says "while respecting the autonomy of the daughter house". Communities are always afraid of outside authority: Father Immediate, Region, General Chapters.

VOTE 37: WE WOULD LIKE A REFLECTION BY THE MGM ON C 81 CONCERNING THE REGIONS.

YES 21 NO 1 ABS 2 **Proposition accepted**

VOTE 38: WE WOULD LIKE THIS REFLECTION TO BE CARRIED OUT

[by ordinary procedure YES 1 NO 23 ABS 1 Proposition rejected]
BY EXTRAORDINARY PROCEDURE.

YES 25 (unanimous) **Proposition accepted**

VOTE 39: WE WOULD LIKE A WORKING PAPER TO BE DRAWN UP TO PREPARE THIS REFLECTION.

YES 22 NO 2 ABS 1 **Proposition accepted**

VOTE 40: THIS WORKING PAPER WILL BE DRAWN UP

[by one person YES 3 NO 18 ABS 4 Proposition rejected]
BY A COMMISSION OF THREE PERSONS.

YES 20 NO 2 ABS 3 **Proposition accepted**

Elected:

Second ballot	M. Monica of Valserena	13 votes
Third ballot	Dom Augustine of Azul	17 votes
Sixth ballot	Dom Placido of Los Andes	14 votes

3.2 Role of the Abbot / Abbess

The MGM of 2005 asked (vote 69) that the theme of the service of authority and of the role of the abbot / abbess be put on the programme of the MGM of 2008. Here we have to decide how we will study this point: a panel? a pastoral document?

The Region of the Isles had done most work on this point, requesting:

1. a pastoral document on the role of the abbot / abbess today and on the responsibility of the community in relation to the service of authority;
2. that this document follow the basic guidelines of Dom Timothy's paper to the Region of the Isles;
3. that there be a panel on consultation, community discernment, and decision-making process;
4. that the MGM address the question of formation to leadership in our communities.

ORIENS also wished the MGM of 2008 to produce a document on the exercise of the service of authority.

The following points were made in the discussion:

- This document should be addressed both to superiors and to the communities, because the service of authority is not limited only to superiors; all the community participate in it. This is the basic point of the conference of Dom Timothy at the Isles Regional meeting. We all live the one Cistercian charism. It needs a communal expression or communal direction for which the superior is responsible, but this emerges from the superior's discernment in relation to each person in the community. Furthermore, the charism of authority concerns, in different degrees, all members of the community, because each one exercises authority to some extent in his/her community service. Many in the community exercise a spiritual paternity or maternity.
- The letter of Dom Bernardo to the RE in 1993 could also be used in our reflection.
- In the ORIENS Region there are many young superiors, and sometimes there are problems. The Father Immediate is often far away. We feel the need for concrete teaching, a kind of *vade mecum* for resolving practical problems.
- Several other Regions had discussed this topic without taking any votes on it. RE has it on the agenda for its next meeting.
- We need to know what is meant by the word "leadership". In English, the primary sense of the word "leader" is someone who shows the way to go, a guide. It is important to help someone to become a "leader", responsible for a group, in an evangelical sense. There is an evolution, in this sense, in the exercise of authority.
- Much has already been done for the formation of superiors, e.g. the course at Tre Fontane; this should be continued. Perhaps the best form of this ongoing formation takes place in the work done in Regional meetings and General Chapters.
- Regular Visitations are also an occasion of learning how to be a superior.
- The delegation of authority is different from the delegation of a job.
- What should be done concretely for the MGM? The Region of the Isles did not propose anything specific, but wished that the subject be deepened in the Mixed Commissions. We could also have a forum or a panel. Every intervention would enrich all the capitulants, and that would be a good way of reflecting on this theme, because the way of exercising authority differs according to culture, age, and experience.
- The sharing of their experiences by several capitulants at the MGM of 2002 was considered to be positive.
- The informal meetings of some superiors of the RéCiF every two or three months are a big help. The superiors share experiences and receive help from others.
- USA discussed this topic at their Regional meeting, initially without much enthusiasm, but the sharing of their experiences, and also of the delegates, developed into something very fruitful.
- The exercise of authority in our present cultural climate is very different from St. Benedict's time, even if the spiritual principles of the Rule are of permanent value.
- The Rule tells us to "run with expanded heart in the way of the divine commandments". The goal of authority should be this freedom of heart for our brothers and sisters: freedom from their fears, their dependence, their lack of responsibility. Authority should not to be focused too much on temporal concerns.
- For the Region of the Isles it is also important that the superiors learn how to find the balance between the participation of the community in decision-making, and decisions taken by the superior. It would be helpful to hear from those who have established a good process for arriving at consensus.

VOTE 41: IN ORDER TO PREPARE THE QUESTION OF THE ROLE OF THE ABBOT / ABBESS, WE WOULD LIKE THE WRITING OF A PAPER THAT WOULD TAKE INTO ACCOUNT THE FOLLOWING DOCUMENTS: THE LETTER OF THE ABBOT GENERAL OF AUGUST 20, 1993, TO THE SPANISH REGION; THE CONFERENCE OF DOM TIMOTHY AT THE REGION OF THE ISLES MEETING OF 2007; THE WORK OF VARIOUS REGIONS.

YES 15 NO 5 ABS 4 **Proposition accepted**

VOTE 42: IN ORDER TO PREPARE THE QUESTION OF THE ROLE OF THE ABBOT / ABBESS, WE WOULD LIKE A FORUM WHICH WOULD GIVE BROAD AND FULL INFORMATION ON THE SUBJECT.

YES 5 NO 11 ABS 9 Proposition rejected

VOTE 43: BEFORE THE EXCHANGES IN THE MIXED COMMISSIONS, WE WOULD LIKE A PANEL ON THIS SUBJECT.

YES 10 NO 12 ABS 3 Proposition rejected

VOTE 44: WE WOULD LIKE THE MGM TO PRODUCE A PASTORAL DOCUMENT FOLLOWING THE EXCHANGES THAT WILL TAKE PLACE ON THE ROLE OF THE ABBOT / ABBESS.

YES 20 NO 2 ABS 3 **Proposition accepted**

VOTE 45: THE QUESTION OF THE ROLE OF ABBOT / ABBESS WILL BE STUDIED IN MIXED COMMISSIONS

[by ordinary procedure YES 4 NO 21 ABS 0 Proposition rejected]
BY EXTRAORDINARY PROCEDURE.

YES 22 NO 1 ABS 2 **Proposition accepted**

M. Marion of Crozet was elected (15 votes) to write this working paper.

3.3 Work in our lives

The MGM of 2005 voted that *"We would like a future MGM to include on its program the question of the implications of work in our life, in the context of contemporary market economy, which gives rise to needs and desires"* (Vote 17). REMILA had proposed that this happen at the MGM of 2008, and that it be studied by Regional Conferences rather than the Mixed Commissions. ORIENS had asked that the theme be included on the agenda of a subsequent MGM. Several other Regions had dealt with the theme of work at their Regional meetings, but without taking any votes.

There are already many topics on the programme of the MGM of 2008, as well as the election of the Abbot General. We do not want to lose sight of the topic of work, but it might be better to continue working on it in the Regions, and to put it on the agenda of a later MGM.

VOTE 46: WE WOULD LIKE THE QUESTION OF *THE IMPLICATIONS OF WORK IN OUR LIFE, IN THE CONTEXT OF CONTEMPORARY MARKET ECONOMY, WHICH GIVES RISE TO NEEDS AND DESIRES*, TO BE PUT ON THE PROGRAMME OF THE MGM OF 2008.

YES 1 NO 18 ABS 6 Proposition rejected

VOTE 47: WE WOULD LIKE THIS QUESTION TO BE FIRST STUDIED IN THE REGIONS IN VIEW OF ITS TREATMENT AT A LATER MGM.

YES 23 NO 0 ABS 2 **Proposition accepted**

3.4 Proposal to add a Statute (14.2.A) to our Constitutions

RéCiF proposed that the following Statute 14.2.A be added to our Constitutions: *"It can happen that a community can no longer follow the traditional equilibrium of the Cistercian life because of age or number of members. In agreement with the Father Immediate, the community can adapt the observances in order to establish an equilibrium favourable to its conversatio; these adaptations should be written in a document proper to the community."*

At a meeting of RéCiF, the Abbot General had proposed that perhaps the Constitutions need to be rewritten for small communities. RéCiF looked into this idea. Feedback suggested that adding a Statute might be better than re-writing the Constitutions.

In many communities with small numbers or aging members the practice of the monastic observances can become a burden, e.g. the celebration of Vigils. Freedom to make adaptations would relieve them of a sense of guilt or failure. At the same time, such adaptations should not be arbitrary, and should have the agreement of the Father Immediate. "Small" can refer to communities which have many members but with a high percentage of them being infirm or inactive.

- The Constitutions already permit adaptations according to local circumstances.
- There are many small communities which feel no need for this Statute, they just get on with living monastic life as they can.
- The ideas of age and small numbers should not be mixed; we need to find other criteria.

VOTE 48: WE WISH TO PUT ON THE PROGRAMME OF THE GENERAL CHAPTERS THE ADDITION OF A STATUTE 14.2.A TO OUR CONSTITUTIONS: *IT CAN HAPPEN THAT A COMMUNITY CAN NO LONGER FOLLOW THE TRADITIONAL EQUILIBRIUM OF THE CISTERCIAN LIFE BECAUSE OF AGE OR THE NUMBER OF MEMBERS. IN AGREEMENT WITH THE FATHER IMMEDIATE, THE COMMUNITY CAN ADAPT ITS OBSERVANCES IN ORDER TO ESTABLISH AN EQUILIBRIUM FAVOURABLE TO ITS CONVERSATIO. THESE ADAPTATIONS SHOULD BE WRITTEN IN A DOCUMENT PROPER TO THE COMMUNITY.*

YES 12 NO 9 ABS 4 **Proposition accepted**

VOTE 49: THIS POINT WILL BE DEALT WITH BY ORDINARY PROCEDURE.

YES 14 NO 8 ABS 3 **Proposition accepted**

VOTE 50: WE ENTRUST THE RÉCIF REGION WITH THE TASK OF PRESENTING THIS QUESTION IN A BRIEF DOCUMENT.

YES 22 NO 0 ABS 3 **Proposition accepted**

3.5 Juridical link between a house of nuns and its foundation

The ORIENS Region asked for "a study considering the possibility of establishing a juridical link between a house of nuns and its foundation at the moment of autonomy, in keeping with the original maternity. This study should be placed on the agenda of the 2008 General Chapters."

The following are some reflections made on this proposition:

- It was in the context of the discussion on Fathers Immediate that ORIENS brought up the possibility of Mothers Immediate, and one way of beginning to move in this direction would be by having a juridical link between a house of nuns and its foundation.
- Communities of monks which have had regular Visitations made by abbesses have in general been very happy with them.
- It is a question which certainly ought to be posed. Normally the link between a founding house and the house which has been founded loses all juridical content. A study should be done.
- After the letter of the Cardinal Prefect, perhaps this is not the opportune moment to go in this direction.
- Need is urging us: the Order lacks Fathers Immediate. Not to respond because of "prudence" might be imprudent... but to respond hastily is also imprudent.
- The establishment of Mothers Immediate goes along the lines of the Congregation, but the unity of the Order is not in danger and the idea is being considered around the concept of filiation.
- The problem of Fathers Immediate comes up often. REMILA had spoken about a redistribution of the Fathers Immediate. We have to look at this point very closely.
- In the case of simple priories, the Father Immediate makes the Visitation but it is the founding house which continues to be responsible for the financial upkeep of the priory...
- There are still many fears in the Church – and in the Order – about the place and the ability of women. There is certainly a significant division between priests and non-priests.
- ORIENS spoke of complementarity. But often there is a bloc; could we make a little breakthrough in order to improve relations between men and women? Often women are affected by men's way of reacting.
- We could also think of the possibility of Regional Visitors. We had this formerly in the Order for the Far East, and it also exists in certain Benedictine Congregations.

VOTE 51: WE WOULD LIKE A STUDY TO BE UNDERTAKEN THAT WOULD CONSIDER THE POSSIBILITY OF ESTABLISHING A JURIDICAL LINK BETWEEN A HOUSE OF NUNS AND ITS FOUNDATION, AT THE MOMENT OF AUTONOMY.

YES 23 NO 1 ABS 1 **Proposition accepted**

VOTE 52: A STUDY WILL BE PREPARED

[by a region YES 0 NO 25 ABS 0 Proposition rejected]

[by a commission elected by the CCs YES 3 NO 19 ABS 3 Proposition rejected]

BY THE LAW COMMISSION.

YES 20 NO 0 ABS 5 **Proposition accepted**

VOTE 53: WE WOULD LIKE THIS STUDY TO BE ON THE PROGRAMME OF THE MGM OF 2008.

YES 12 NO 6 ABS 7 **Proposition accepted**

VOTE 54: THIS POINT WILL BE TREATED AT THE MGM BY ORDINARY PROCEDURE.

YES 12 NO 9 ABS 3 **Proposition accepted**

3.6 Request of the Community of Géronde for Incorporation

The community of Cistercian nuns of Géronde in Switzerland, of pontifical right, has expressed its desire to be incorporated into the Order from which it has been separated for more than three hundred years. At the moment they are under the jurisdiction of the bishop. It is a matter of deciding if we will put this point on the programme of the MGM, and of seeing how to proceed. This community has participated for a number of years in Regional conferences, first in FSO, now in REI. It wants to have a more direct link with the Order.

Géronda draws up a house report for the Regional meeting, and there are no fundamental differences with our observances.

M. Danièle accompanied the Visitor, Dom Jean-Marc of Acey, delegated by the bishop, for Visitations in 2004 and 2007. The community is made up of twenty sisters; the median age is 70 years. The last profession took place in 1987. Géronda is in fact a recent foundation (1935) of Colombey (also in Switzerland) and it is that community which separated from the Order. Before that separation, their Father Immediate was Tamié. The two monasteries are autonomous and of pontifical right but Colombey has presented its Constitutions to the Holy See for approval while Géronda wishes to be incorporated into the Order.

On June 11th, each member of the community responded to the following text: "I wish that our community asks the Order of Cistercians of the Strict Observance to authorise us to follow its Constitutions, *ad experimentum*, **with a view to incorporation**, and to accompany us in our journey and according to the ways determined by the Order, in agreement with our bishop." The response was a unanimous yes. This text does not want to give the impression of putting pressure on the Order. To vote on their incorporation at the next Chapter seems too soon, but in order not to have to wait until 2011, the Chapter could delegate the Abbot General and his Council to do it before that date. This topic is quite new for most of the abbesses, and we must avoid giving the impression that things are already decided. A first step would be to send two abbesses to visit this community in order better to inform the Chapter, and to invite their Prioress, M. Myriam, to the MGM of 2008.

VOTE 55: WE PUT ON THE PROGRAMME OF THE GENERAL CHAPTER OF ABBESSES THE REQUEST OF THE COMMUNITY OF BERNARDINES OF GÉRONDE WHO WISH TO BEGIN A PROCESS WITH A VIEW TO THEIR POSSIBLE INCORPORATION INTO THE ORDER.

YES 25 (unanimous)

Proposition accepted

VOTE 56: WE INVITE THE Prioress OF GÉRONDE TO THE GENERAL CHAPTER OF 2008 TO PRESENT HER REQUEST.

YES 25 (unanimous)

Proposition accepted

VOTE 57: WE WOULD LIKE TWO ABBESSES TO VISIT THE COMMUNITY OF GÉRONDE WITH A VIEW TO GIVING FURTHER INFORMATION TO THE GENERAL CHAPTER OF 2008.

YES 25 (unanimous)

Proposition accepted

VOTE 58: WE WISH TO CHOOSE THE TWO ABBESSES.

YES 3 NO 17 ABS 4

Proposition rejected

(Therefore the Abbot General and his council will make the choice.)

3.7 Ratio Institutionis

REI asked for an adaptation of the *Ratio Institutionis*; ORIENS is satisfied with the present *Ratio* but would welcome some supplementary documents.

It is twenty years since the *Ratio* was drawn up; it is normal that such a document be re-evaluated and adapted from time to time. The people involved in formation now are not the same ones who drew it up, they are coming to it from a new perspective. The *Ratio* places high demands on us, and this is appreciated. But some help in living up to those demands

would also be useful. The *Ratio* itself envisages that it will be adapted to local situations. REMILA is working on this at Regional level.

The meeting of Regional Secretaries of Formation at Tre Fontane next year will include a consideration of the *Ratio*. Suggestions for a future MGM will probably come from that meeting, but probably not for 2008.

3.8 Approval of new Regions

At the meeting at Mont Sainte Odile (2005) it was foreseen that there would be a meeting of the old Regions (FSO, CNE, NED) at the MGM 2008, to evaluate the experience of the new division of the houses of FSO and CNE in three new Regions (CNE, REI and RéCiF) before the approval of these new Regions (REM was already approved in 2005).

RéCiF and CNE had voted, during their last meeting, to request their approval at the MGM of 2008. REI has not yet taken a decision on this subject, but wishes (as does RéCiF) to have a meeting of the old Regions at the 2008 MGM. However, as all seem to be satisfied with the new distribution, it is perhaps unnecessary for this meeting to take place.

It is important that the approval of these new Regions take place at the beginning of the MGM so that they may function legitimately as such. A report will be presented to the capitulants. It was clarified that the approval of a Region leaves each community free to change Region.

VOTE 59: THE APPROVAL OF THE NEW REGIONS WILL BE PRESENTED IN THE GENERAL CHAPTERS BY SIMPLE PROCEDURE.

YES 25 (UNANIMOUS)

Proposition accepted

3.9 Miscellaneous

3.9.1 Vote 71 of the General Chapter of Abbesses of 2005

Two Regions (CNE and NED) asked that the reflection on Vote 71 concerning ST 39.3.B be re-opened.

The vote: "*In an abbatial election postulation is required in order that a monk or nun who does not belong to the community and who is not its superior ad nutum, becomes abbot / abbess*" was accepted by the nuns (yes 48; no 18; abs 6) and rejected by monks (yes 57; no 39; abs 3 – this vote needed a two-thirds majority).

- If we are not in agreement with this Vote 71 of the preceding Chapter, the normal procedure to follow is not to approve it when the Acts of the Chapter are presented for confirmation.
- It is not a matter of wanting to have the same legislation for the monks and the nuns at any price; rather CNE does not agree with the content of the proposal accepted by the nuns. All the members of the Order have the right to be elected in another community.
- When there is a case of a superior being named, that is different. Generally the abbot or abbess of the person in question is consulted. [The Abbot General gave some

information about the current number of superiors who come from another community: 19 monks, 9 nuns].

- The CNE meeting dealt with this point because it seemed that the vote was taken in the light of a particular case of a house of monks, but it was the nuns who accepted the proposition limiting the right of electing someone from another community. It seemed that a certain number of capitulants did not understand very well what was at issue.

VOTE 60: WE SUGGEST TO THE REGIONS WHO QUESTION VOTE 71 OF THE CHAPTER OF ABBESSES OF 2005, THAT THEY INTERVENE AT THE CHAPTER OF 2008 WHEN THE CONFIRMATION OF THE ACTS OF THE GENERAL CHAPTER OF ABBESSES OF 2005 IS BEING CONSIDERED.

YES 23 NO 0 ABS 2 **Proposition accepted**

3.9.2 Revisiting Cst 29

The Region of the Isles had asked the Central Commission to place Cst 29.6 on the agenda of the next MGM, with a view to omitting this paragraph from the Constitution.

In the light of the information given by the Abbot General concerning other requests to the Holy See to change our Constitutions, this request was withdrawn.

3.9.3 Minutes of the MGM

The Region of the Isles proposed that the Central Commissions initiate a study of the use of the Minutes of the General Chapters, and the process of drawing up these minutes. Perhaps verbatim minutes are not the most suitable way of recording the proceedings of the MGM today? Producing them involves intensive work on the part of many secretaries and translators; perhaps a synthetic method would be more useful. For example, a polyglot version of the verbatim proceedings could be kept at the Generalate (or distributed electronically to anyone who wanted it), together with a back-up digital sound recording. From this a synthesis could be produced for general distribution (cf. minutes of the Region of the Isles Regional Meeting, 2007, p. 61).

- This method is already in use in some Regions for their Regional meetings.
- If the topics could be grouped together, the minutes would be much more useful. Now, if you want to follow a theme you have to pick out the bits from many sessions. It is not encouraging.
- Some Orders no longer have minutes of their Chapters. For example, the Marist brothers record all their discussions and archive them at their Generalate, then send a synthetic report to the houses.
- ORIENS had also questioned the usefulness of the minutes. Usually the superiors find it impossible to read everything. Perhaps two versions could be drawn up, the full version and a summary or résumé of the parts which are important for our daily lives. However, the proposal "*We would be satisfied with simplified minutes of the General Chapter*" was rejected by the ORIENS regional meeting (minutes, p. 17).
- Producing a synthesis would increase the work: there would have to be full minutes first and then the synthesis. A synthetic report is relatively easy for the Central Commission meeting, but for the MGM, someone would have to be capable of capturing all the

- nuances. Who would judge what would be included?
- When a vote is taken, and later the issue is revisited, it is necessary to have available the whole of the discussion that led to the vote.
 - People who use a language other than one of the three official languages of the Order already find it difficult to deal with the official texts of the Order. If, in addition, only résumés are available, they are further disadvantaged.
 - When presenting the work of the MGM to the community, it seems much more alive to use the discussions, rather than summary texts. Also it is interesting to hear various opinions.
 - In some monasteries the minutes are read in the ref.
- A sound recording would not be a practical way of replacing a written report. But we could use modern technology: the whole of the MGM could be put on a small CD or DVD.
 - During the MGM at Lourdes an update was posted on the internet every day, to enable the communities to follow its progress. This was not something official, but it was very popular. Could it be done again? Perhaps it could be made into an official part of the MGM, with someone appointed to do the job.
 - One of the problems with the present system is the translation work afterwards. It is a very big task, and competent people need to be available. More help is needed with this.

3.9.4 Avoid returning to a topic refused at the previous MGM

REI asked if a way could be found to avoid returning to the MGM a proposal rejected at the previous MGM. And, since it seems that the question of the right to vote of delegates comes up in every MGM, they wonder if it would be useful to introduce something into our legislation about this. For example, to say that if NO has been said to a question in an MGM, that a certain amount of time, two or three Meetings, must pass before going back to treat the rejected question again. Thus we would not systematically go back to it in the next MGM, especially if there is nothing new to say about it.

RE clarified that the question of the right to vote of delegates came up at the 2005 MGM. The Chapters gave a negative answer, and it rests there. Before that, it had come up in other places: Regional Conferences, Central Commissions, but not at the General Chapters.

REMILA thinks that nothing comes to the MGM without having been first raised in the Regional Conferences and passed by the Central Commissions. It is not necessary to bring the proposition of REI to the MGM. If things get to the MGM it is because they have been conscientiously discerned in other places.

Before a subject comes to the MGM it has passed through many filters. There seems to be a cultural temptation to want to have norms for everything, to control everything by laws. We have to allow things to come to life in the Chapters. And life and light come from the discussions. Having a law to control this seems to go against the flow of life in the Order. We should not establish a general norm on the basis of a specific topic such as the delegates. It would not be wise, because from discussion, issues can be reopened for further consideration. This is what happened in the last MGM and it was very fruitful. Those who draw up the programme have to discern whether or not it is appropriate to bring up a topic again, but we should not establish a rigid norm which could block many things which should not be blocked.

4. ORGANISATION OF THE MGM

4.1 Persons to provide help for new capitulants

The expert at the 2005 MGM (Dom Jean Doutre) noted in his report that during the first five days, about thirty capitulants came to him for information on the procedure or for an explanation of one point or another. It is necessary for new superiors and delegates to have someone to go to for information. It would help them to be more involved, especially in voting, and would mean fewer abstentions. This person needs to be introduced to the assembly, to be recognisable.

Suggestions were made about how best to provide this ministry of information and help:

- have one or more persons appointed to that job, identified at the beginning of the MGM, e.g. (a) former superior(s);
- it could be part of the task of the expert, if we choose to have one;
- each Mixed Commission could appoint a vice-president for this service to the new superiors in that Commission;
- each Region could nominate someone for the new superiors from that Region.

VOTE 61: WE WISH THAT SOME PEOPLE BE APPOINTED TO RESPOND TO THE QUESTIONS OF THE CAPITULANTS, ESPECIALLY OF NEW SUPERIORS.

YES 23 NO 1 ABS 1

Proposition accepted

VOTE 62: EACH REGION WILL DESIGNATE A MEMBER OF THAT REGION FOR THIS TASK.

YES 4 NO 19 ABS 1

Proposition rejected

VOTE 63: EACH MIXED COMMISSION WILL DESIGNATE A MEMBER OF THAT COMMISSION FOR THIS TASK.

YES 15 NO 8 ABS 2

Proposition accepted

Delegates

NED requested that there be an initiation for delegates at the beginning of the MGM. It was proposed that they come with the new superiors for initiation.

4.2 Commission for the Formulation of Votes

USA had asked that the Central Commissions evaluate the function and effectiveness of the Commission for the formulation of votes.

This Commission existed for the first time at the MGM of 2005; it was intended to help the Coordinating Commission. The members of the Coordination Commission of 2005 who were present, and Dom Bede (a member of the Commission for the Formulation of Votes) agreed that there had been problems. It is not always possible to participate in discussion in the aula and at the same time listen for points which would affect the formulation of a vote. Votes were formulated but subsequently had to be completely changed. The Coordinating Commission generally has a better overall view of the situation and is better placed to formulate votes. Translation late at night may be a problem, but that is another issue. If the Coordinating Commission draws up the votes, it might be possible to ask someone else to look over them before they are presented; a fresh eye might detect something that is not so clear.

VOTE 64: WE WISH TO MAINTAIN THE COMMISSION FOR THE FORMULATION OF VOTES.
YES 0 NO 20 ABS 5 Proposition rejected

4.3 Election of *ad hoc* Commission members

USA and CAN asked that for *ad hoc* Commissions, the members be elected one by one and with an absolute majority.

This process was used throughout this meeting of the Central Commissions.

VOTE 65: WE SUGGEST THAT, FOR THE MEMBERSHIP OF *AD HOC* COMMISSIONS AT THE MGM, THE PERSONS BE ELECTED ONE BY ONE AND WITH AN ABSOLUTE MAJORITY.
YES 25 (unanimous) **Proposition accepted**

(This proposition should be included in the Procedures of the MGM and should be approved by the capitulants at the beginning of the MGM)

4.4 Evaluation during the MGM

USA suggested that a brief autocritique be made on the functioning of the MGM, by the Mixed Commissions, at the end of the first and second week of the MGM. It might be more useful than waiting until the very end, and would help the Coordinating Commission to know if any changes need to be made.

VOTE 66: WE WISH THAT THE MIXED COMMISSIONS AT THE END OF THE FIRST AND SECOND WEEKS OF THE MGM HAVE A BRIEF AUTOCRITIQUE ON THE FUNCTIONING OF THE MGM.
YES 24 NO 0 ABS 1 **Proposition accepted**

4.5 Persons to be invited

The members of the Central Commissions suggested some names of people who might be invited to the MGM 2008:

- Dom Ambrose, for the whole of the MGM
- the postulatrix is always invited for some days
- the Central Secretary for Formation, for some days

For one day:

- the Abbot General of the Order of Cîteaux and/or an Abbot President of a Congregation, chosen by the Abbot General O.Cist
- the Abbot Primate of the Benedictines and/or an Abbot President of a Congregation
- the Prioress General of the Bernardines of Esquermes (who will be newly-elected)
- the Prioress General of the Bernardines of Oudenaarde
- the Committee which represents the associations of lay Cistercians
- the General of the Marianhill religious
- the President or a representative of AIM
- Sister Enrica Rosanna of the CIVCSVA

We must allow some flexibility to the Abbot General and his Council according to the responses they receive to the invitations. Those invited will be asked to come after the election of the new Abbot General.

We cannot ask them all to speak to the assembly because this would overload the programme.

VOTE 67: THE CENTRAL COMMISSIONS DELEGATE TO THE ABBOT GENERAL AND HIS COUNCIL THE TASK OF INVITING THE PERSONS TO THE MGM, TAKING INTO ACCOUNT THE LIST PROPOSED BY THE CENTRAL COMMISSIONS.

YES 24 NO 0 ABS 1

Proposition accepted

4.6 Liturgy

The Region of the Isles suggested that Lauds and Vespers be celebrated by the whole assembly together, rather than in language groups, to cut down on the work of preparation and to enhance our sense of unity. RéCiF, however, wished to have Vespers celebrated in language groups.

VOTE 68: WE WOULD LIKE LAUDS AND MASS TO BE CELEBRATED TOGETHER.

YES 15 NO 7 ABS 3

Proposition accepted

Concerning the suggestion that Lauds and Mass be integrated, some felt that it would be too heavy a liturgy for every day. If people get sick, or very tired, they may prefer to attend Mass only.

VOTE 69: WE WISH THAT LAUDS AND MASS BE INTEGRATED.

YES 2 NO 19 ABS 3

Proposition rejected

RéCiF proposed using Latin at least for the Ordinary and the Common of the Mass. It was noted that the Holy Father recently encouraged more frequent use of Latin. But it might be difficult for some newer capitulants.

VOTE 70: WE WOULD LIKE LATIN TO BE USED FOR THE ORDINARY AND THE COMMON OF THE MASS.

YES 14 NO 6 ABS 5

Proposition accepted

VOTE 71: WE ENTRUST THE RÉCIF REGION WITH THE TASK OF PREPARING A BOOKLET FOR THESE CELEBRATIONS.

YES 25 (unanimous)

Proposition accepted

There were requests for a better place in which to celebrate the liturgy (REI) or at least the Eucharist (CAN), some place with a more conducive atmosphere and a sense of beauty. The possibility of going to the basilica for Mass was mentioned. Those directly concerned with the preparation will do the best they can. It is not easy to find a place for the MGM which meets all our requirements.

RéCiF proposed that there be a master of ceremonies exclusively dedicated to that service. After nominations, Fr Maurice of Tamié was elected (21 votes).

4.7 Papal Audience

It is a fact that Pope Benedict XVI does not give private audiences, which is what we would like to have, so that we could present the newly-elected Abbot General, and receive a special

word for the Order. If we have to do without a private audience, there would be somewhat less interest in travelling from Assisi to Rome just to be present at a public audience.

However ORIENS and REMILA would like an audience since their communities are at a great distance and rarely come to Rome, and this would make them feel closer to the Universal Church. That would be its value: it is an experience of being part of the People of God.

VOTE 72: WE WOULD LIKE THAT ARRANGEMENTS BE MADE SO THAT THE MEMBERS OF THE MGM OF 2008 COULD PARTICIPATE IN A WEDNESDAY PUBLIC AUDIENCE OF THE HOLY FATHER – A DAY WHICH WOULD BE ENTIRELY FREE.

YES 21 NO 0 ABS 4

Proposition accepted

4.8 Personnel

This is a matter of suggesting names of those capable of fulfilling the different services during the MGM of 2008: a coordinator of the secretariat, a secretary and an assistant (typist) for each of the three principal languages, a secretary with overall responsibility for the minutes in the three languages, interpreters, translators of texts (some of whom need to be able to stay for some time after the end of the MGM).

We could also have some names of people capable of translating texts quickly and sending them by email, while staying in their monasteries.

During the MGM of 2005, the flu epidemic showed that one infirmarian was not enough, especially because all did not have rooms in the same building.

Each Region should think about this and propose names to the Abbot General's Council. Precise details of the skills needed and specific job descriptions for these people can be provided.

Secretary of the Coordination Commission

Following the proposal of a member of the meeting, Sr. M. Madeleine of Echourgnac was nominated by the Central Commissions to perform again at the MGM of 2008 the service of Secretary of the Coordination Commission (cf. no. 8 of the Regulations of the MGM).

4.9 Expert

Each participant in the meeting had received and had read the report of the Dom Jean Doutre of Oka, expert at the last MGM. In the course of a brief exchange some points were made about improving the functioning of the MGM, taking into account the observations made in this document.

- In 2005 the new capitulants (who make up about one third of the total participants at every MGM) did not know who the expert was and what was his role. He could have helped them more, and also helped the delegates, by giving information and explanations. (See also 4.1 above).

- The role of the expert is not well-defined. The problem is that each time we have decided to have an expert, it was done with some reluctance and giving him only very limited scope: to observe, and to give his advice after the MGM.
- In Dom Jean Doutre's report, the point about the synthesis of the reports of the Commissions on the subject of C 29 is interesting. This method could be used more often. It is indeed tedious to listen to fifteen Commission reports one after another. If they were given out in advance, people could read them privately and the Coordinating Commission could present just a synthesis.
- It is important that the General Coordinator transmit to the personnel of the secretariat all the points of information given at the beginning of the plenary sessions; also these people should be able to come to listen to the conferences of the Abbot General.
- A brief presentation at the beginning of the MGM would enable people to recognise those who are performing the various services: the infirmarian, the cellarer, etc., and where to find them.

VOTE 73: WE WISH TO HAVE AN EXPERT PRESENT AT THE MGM OF 2008.

YES	6	NO	14	ABS	5	Proposition rejected
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VOTE 74: WE WISH THAT THE DOCUMENT OF DOM JEAN DOUTRE BE PASSED ON TO EACH OF THE CAPITULANTS.

YES	22	NO	0	ABS	3	Proposition accepted
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II. PLENARY COUNCIL OF THE ABBOT GENERAL

1. Response of the Congregation for Religious to the request concerning a single Chapter

The Abbot General gave information about the negative response of the Cardinal Prefect regarding our request for a single General Chapter. This letter also gave a reply to a point which we had not raised.

2. The community of Saint-Sauveur in Lebanon

The Abbot General also gave some information concerning the community of Saint-Sauveur, ex-foundation of Latroun, at present under the jurisdiction of the local bishop.

3. The Community of Marija Zvijezda in Bosnia Herzegovina

A report about this community was also given to the members of the Central Commissions.

4. Report on the dissolution of three communities of nuns and the establishment of a new community

The Abbot General introduced this topic and explained the presence of M. Inès:

For five years, five abbesses of monasteries of nuns in France had been meeting to reflect on the future of their communities. Last year they did further work on this, and three of the five communities with their Fathers Immediate, and the help of Dom Patrick and M. Danièle arrived at some decisions. It seemed opportune that one of the three superiors explain the present situation of the three communities, and what they hope from the General Chapter. Given that it is a new situation it is important to hear the members of the Central Commissions on this subject, their advice or ideas. Dom Patrick will read the report, then we will hear M. Inès and open the dialogue.

Dom Patrick read the report (cf. Annexe III), clarifying that it had been drawn up in collaboration with the three superiors, written by Dom Guillaume, and modified a little by himself.

M. Inès explained that she came to Belval at the end of July 2006 as superior *ad nutum*, at the request of Dom Guillaume, because M. Janine had reached 75 years of age and the community wished to have a superior from outside. The process had already begun. At Belval the sisters were very conscious that they could not continue on their own. What is envisaged is seen by the sisters as a project of life. For the old sisters it is very important to stay in a monastery, because even if they stay in their rooms, they can follow the liturgy and certain community activities.

The new community will be made up of 21 dependent sisters, 30 sisters over 75 years who are still active, and about 15 under the age of 75. It is a real challenge to find a rhythm suitable for each of these groups and to adapt the buildings.

The process of listening to the communities involved was important. There were numerous journeys made for the work of explaining, and for collecting the answers to questionnaires. It was important to respect the feelings of each superior, as these were truly a reflection of what the community was saying and wanting. There was a gradual synchronisation in the position of the communities. There were happy moments, and also difficult moments when one saw all the problems but no solutions.

M. Inès was designated as superior of the new community. The two abbesses of Igny and Grâce-Dieu will continue to be abbesses until the Chapter of 2008. But it was necessary to have one person in charge to coordinate the work done together and to prepare the monastery of Igny to receive the combined three communities at Pentecost 2008. There are mutual visits of one community to another. The material and economic aspects are being looked after by Sr. Marie Noël of Échourgnac: the work to be done at Igny, the preparation of the economy for the new community, what to do with the other two monasteries.

Normally it is the General Chapter which must agree to the closure of a monastery and name a commission for that, but something had to be done urgently.

The suppression of a monastery is something very particular and different in every case. There has to be a vote of the community before the decision of the General Chapter, and this has been done in the case of the three communities involved in this project. The Holy See also needs the vote of the General Chapter for the closure of the communities. What complicates this situation is that the new community will be living at Igny before the Chapter. But it is the same as in the case of a foundation which often lives in a monastery which has been built before being approved. Sometimes it is the Abbot General's Council which approves a foundation, but in this case it is still a little early for that, which is why we

are talking about it here. There also remain the problems which we have confided to the Law Commission for study: from whom will the superior of this new group receive her authority? The new community does not yet have a Father Immediate. But nobody wants to make these communities suffer any more; on the contrary, we want to give them the possibility of life.

M. Aurora of El Encuentro had thought that M. Inès' service at Belval would be only for one year. Despite the sacrifice which it means for her community, she recognises the activity of the Holy Spirit in the solution found for these three communities.

The problem is not primarily that of the most elderly sisters, because in France there are possibilities for getting help. But none of the three communities was in a position to receive young people, while the group of the fifteen "youngest" in the new community will be able to do so. It is not that the community of Igny is receiving the group, it is a regrouping of living forces to give new life, while allowing the older sisters to follow Cistercian life at their own pace without being a burden on the younger ones.

Concerning the two communities which did not join in this project: at Altbronn they are thinking of a transfer, while at Ubexy they want to adapt life to be more in keeping with their present means.

In Spain (the RE with the Congregation of St Bernard) and in Ireland some reflection has also begun on the subject of solutions for communities in a very precarious situation.

III: DIVERS

1. Report of the Central Secretary for Formation

The following is a summary of Sr Pamela's report to the Central Commissions.

1. Thank you for inviting me to speak to you at this meeting; it is a pleasure to be here.
2. The MGM of 2005 voted (vote 15) to have the Central Secretary for Formation prepare a dossier of texts from the MGMs of 2002 and 2005 related to formation. I have this halfway completed and expect to finish in the coming month.
3. I have met with formators in several regions.

(a) From participating in the joint O.Cist and OCSO Francophone and Germanophone formators' meeting in Helfta (May-June 2006) it was clear to me that collaboration within the Cistercian family is to be encouraged and is beneficial. These sessions particularly benefit our houses in Germany, which are rather isolated. My discussions with these formators led to initiating the Cistercian formation website (www.cistercian-formation.org) and to offering to distribute course materials on CD as they become available. These initiatives will not solve all the problems of small houses, but they are a start.

(b) I was asked to present sessions on the Education of Desires to the formators of the ORIENS region at Phare in September 2006. There is great diversity in the Region and great distances between countries represented. Changes in language and symbol structures affect this Region as well as others, and formators need to be aware of this. The Region needs Cistercian texts in its own languages.

(c) Recently the first joint meeting of novice directors and junior directors in the USA took place, with Sr Sandra Schneider IHM as presenter. There was much to learn; we need to parse the information and make it applicable to our tradition where possible. Two women's houses in this Region are receiving younger candidates (late 20s). The workload of formators is heavy with jobs other than formation.

4. I believe that we need to foster collaboration, to help build trust and to help individuals and communities to learn from each other. Today there are means of sharing materials for formation. This is the reason behind setting up the website www.cistercian-formation.org. Here information can be shared. There is a section for dialogue (Aula). There is the beginning of a *studium*. At first this may benefit teachers more than students. I am asking monks and nuns who have developed courses to make these materials available online, either for others to use as they are, or to use as a starting point for developing their own courses. I hope to have materials in the three major languages.

The structure of the site is designed to foster collaboration. The software used is Open Source and does not cost money. It resides on an external server, not on a Wrentham computer. It is designed to have several people post materials. My intent is to have worldwide collaborators in the structuring of the site and not to have it depend on one person.

Internet use raises issues for some. However, we are encouraged by the Church to use this means to evangelize. I suggest we not fear this means, but rather use it prudently. Each house will have its own policies about internet use.

5. Some issues that are very important for formation in our time are fear, violence and abuse. The statistics for the USA are that one in every three women has been somehow abused, sexually or physically. It is probably as high in other parts of the world where statistics are not available. It may not be as bad for men, but it is nevertheless widespread. This has huge implications for those who come to us as candidates. We need to foster trust and collaboration, and to emphasize a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. We can help candidates develop or deepen that relationship in their affective centre, which is essential if they are to persevere happily.

6. There will be a meeting of Regional Secretaries for Formation in Tre Fontane in June 2008. A review of the *Ratio Institutionis* has been requested. The programme for the meeting has not been finalized; that will happen when the minutes of all the Regional Meetings have been reviewed and the Regional Secretaries consulted. I hope that the meeting will produce something of positive value for the MGM 2008, but I cannot say yet what shape that product will take.

7. I am hopeful for future since the future is life in and with Jesus.

Points from the Exchange with Sr Pamela

- When we speak of formation, we need to remember that more than half of those in initial formation in the Order are in only one-third of the monasteries, most of them in Asia, Africa and Latin America.
- In practice there is quite a lot of collaboration in formation, through the provision of courses, etc, with the O.Cist and with various Benedictine communities, though it varies from one country and Region to another.
- Re collaboration: our Cistercian tradition values *friendship*. We need to discover a methodology for passing on the tools of friendship to newcomers.
- Website courses can be very good, but they cannot replace the presence of a living teacher, someone skilled, who can pass on the Cistercian tradition and values by personal contact. We should pay more attention to training such teachers, and share them with houses which find it difficult to get speakers locally.
- The whole community plays a part in formation. We need to help those in solemn vows to be renewed in their Cistercian vocation and charism, so that they do not give counter-witness to those in initial formation.
- Those who have been abused need healing, and our own observances can contribute to this. It is important to help people to grow in dialogue and listening to God, to accompany them in their prayer journey, to encourage them to stay with *lectio* not just when God is absent but also in times of consolation, when God is present, not to run away from God's loving touch when it comes.
- People who have suffered violence are highly sensitive to words or actions that seem to be dominating. We all need to grow in the ability to communicate gently and with words that do not unintentionally convey harm. Sr Pamela suggested that some of the language of the psalms may present particular problems for today's entrants.
- We have to discern whether someone who has been very deeply wounded can be carried for a long time by the community, and how many such people a community can support. That is for each community to decide in its own circumstances. The superior must take into account the wellbeing of the whole community.
- It is almost impossible to give hope to give to someone who does not already have it. But we can communicate our own confidence in that person. We can choose not to give up on a person, to persevere in active love, to disengage from our own anger, resentment and loss of hope, and so live the Gospel.
- Formation needs for women are somewhat different than for men. Perhaps we have focused too much on head knowledge and not helped people to integrate fully. But this applies to formation in men's monasteries too.

2. Information concerning the Process of Beatification of Br. Zacarías of La Oliva

The community of La Oliva expressed to the Central Commissions its desire to initiate the process of beatification of Brother Zacarías Santamaría Garamendia, about whom information was given in the MGM at Rome in 2002. They wish to present his case in the next MGM of 2008.

- Zacarías died in the monastery of La Oliva (Spain) in 1986, and at the request of those who spoke of his great sanctity, the community began to collect information about him in 1994. The diocese showed a lot of interest and encouraged taking the necessary steps.
- A first step was to take a vote of the community in 2002, approving the initiation of the process.
- In 2003 the *nihil obstat* was received from Rome.
- In 2006 M. Augusta, the Postulatrix of the Order, was informed about what had been done to gather official documents about Br. Zacarías. It is not easy because he was a simple man who left nothing in writing, and so we are depending on the witness of people who knew him. Up to now we have obtained nine of his letters; some are the original texts and others are photocopies. The high regard of the people for his sanctity and his quality as a spiritual man are evident both in the direct testimonies and in the writings.
- To make him better known, a small booklet was published entitled (in Spanish) "Br. Zacarías, a story of love".
- At the moment the community is stepping up its contacts with the witnesses who knew him, so as to be able to present something substantial and to make an evaluation of the data which has been gathered in order to get a concrete decision at the General Chapters.

The dialogue which followed the presentation emphasised the importance of having in the Order such simple people who have met Jesus and have known how to express it in their lives. Some compared him to Blessed Joseph-Marie Cassant for his simplicity, devotion, and hidden life. They are witnesses who contribute grace and special help to those who approach them, to their communities and to the Order. It is also interesting that, for Blessed Cassant as well as for Br. Zacarías, the interest in his holiness came in the first place from the lay people who knew him, before coming from his own community.

3. Information about courses for the ongoing formation of superiors in the Spanish Region (RE)

This information was given by Dom Marcos.

The renewal courses for superiors in the Spanish Region (RE) began about fifteen years ago, and their object was and is to bring the superiors' formation up to date. We are aware that if superiors are not interested in their own formation, or did not receive a good formation, or do not have broad horizons, they cannot develop or grow, and this has repercussions for the permanent formation of their communities.

So we considered these courses for the formation of superiors. They are called "renewal" courses ("reciclaje" in Spanish), that is to say, for updating, to be in a position to lead a community today. It is the same thing as talking about "formation for leadership". It is about preparing people to be able to give life to their communities. That is the aim of these courses, to make people ready and able to help their communities to move forward surely, open to the future; for if the superiors are not open to the future, if they are fearful and backward-looking, the communities will also be like that.

- As a rule, we meet in a place which is not a monastery. We have met in an Augustinian house, in a mountain village near Madrid: Becerril de la Sierra,

- in order to be free from the obligations of the horarium which would apply if we were in a community,
- also for us superiors to be able to meet in a more relaxed atmosphere, where we can open up and speak about personal and community experiences and problems. This creates a fraternal atmosphere, free from prejudices and which brings people closer together. Formerly the Spanish Region was quite different, and these meetings have gone a long way towards transparency and towards freedom from fear in communication.
- For several years now we have read the Visitation cards and the reports about the cards of all the communities without hiding anything.

We choose people to give us courses on concrete themes about religious life.

- Sometimes this has been a monk: twice we have had the Abbot General, once we had Dom Armand on the Rule of St Benedict.
- But usually we have a religious who specializes in this kind of dynamic of creating an atmosphere of dialogue. This year it was a Dominican sister who specializes in group dynamics. The theme was "Resources for animating people and communities". She dealt with very interesting topics such as self-esteem, assertivity (this was a new term for us, rather unknown and overwhelming), conflict resolution, how to present a problem: giving time to the superior and to the people involved to prepare before broaching the subject.
- Participation is voluntary, but up to now nobody has been missing except for a grave reason. We know that someone who does not want to participate in these meetings will become isolated, and will impoverish him/herself and the community. We are very happy with these meetings which have helped towards solving problems of the Region, thus lightening the agenda of the Regional meetings. We also deal with urgent problems which cannot wait until the Regional meeting.

As a rule we meet once a year. The course lasts for five days, and afterwards another day is given over to subjects particular to the Region.

The courses have been reserved for the abbots and abbesses of the RE, but we also invite the Mother President of the Congregation of St Bernard (Las Huelgas), and if there is room, other abbesses of that Congregation. Usually there are about ten.

EVALUATION OF THE MEETING

- The thing which impressed everybody most was the fraternal and welcoming atmosphere which prevails in the Cardeña community. The brothers, especially the brother guestmaster, did their utmost to make our stay peaceful and happy. We were very struck both by their spirit of devotion, kindness and generosity, and by their prayerful liturgy, all of which greatly helped us to do our work peacefully and efficiently.
- Having our meals every day in the refectory with the community created a very special climate, giving a more tranquil rhythm than other meetings where we are always talking. This way of doing things, which we experienced for the first time, was much appreciated and praised because at the same time it allowed us to feel the closeness and the care of the brothers.

- We felt ourselves at home; the good and abundant food and drink, the picnic with the community, the well-kept environment of the whole monastery – all made us feel well and helped us in our work.
- The dynamics of the meeting, with short breaks of five minutes during the sessions, also helped us to work with energy.
- The contribution of the two new members of the Coordinating Commission was appreciated: they did much work and fitted well into its way of operating.
- The simultaneous translation system, and the translators themselves, worked well.
- It was a very pleasant meeting (some said that it was the best they had ever been at), where it was easy to share ideas, discuss them, and finally come to good decisions and conclusions. We were relaxed, we laughed and made jokes, but at the same time we worked long and hard .
- The patience, efficiency and hard work of the three members of the Commission which drew up "The House Reports and their Treatment at the MGM" and the "Practical Guide" were outstanding.
- Likewise we are aware that our good work was possible thanks to all that had been done beforehand in the Regions, and to the document summing up that work which greatly facilitated our task. What we have done in the Central Commissions is a work done in conjunction with the whole Order.
- It was suggested for the future that, according as topics are dealt with and put on the programme of the General Chapters, a list might be made of these topics so that we could see what points remain to be dealt with and how to move them forward. In this way we could visualise and know how the work of the Central Commissions is progressing.
- Concerning the visit of the Central Secretary for Formation, it was said that her task is not easy because it is not well-defined. We appreciate her attitude of taking risks and facing up to things, her approach to finding new ways of doing things, such as the use of the internet for education. The web page about formation is very important for the Order because the subject of formation really needs more attention.
- The excursion to the monastery of Las Huelgas and to the cathedral of Burgos was well organised and was of great cultural and artistic interest.
- Someone said that, our experience in this meeting being so rich, it is a pity that the minutes can convey to the houses only a tiny outline of it, and cannot give them a bit more of what we shared. But it was also said that the proper work of the Central Commissions is to prepare the programme for the next MGM, and that is best reflected in a synthetic report. Every delegate can give more information and can bring his / her own experience back to the houses of the Region.
- Sincere thanks to Dom Marcos and the community of Cardeña for making possible all that has been mentioned.

CONCLUSION

Dom Bernardo concluded the meeting, saying:

"I do not want to have the last word... Just a word of goodbye because it is my last Central Commission, at least as Abbot General.

Looking at the list of Central Commission meetings in which I have participated, they have always been joint ones. The first was in 1986, and since then I have participated in all the Central Commissions. That is history. In time to come we will no longer remember when we had separate Chapters.

Concerning the functioning of the Central Commissions, I think we have arrived at a satisfactory method of working in a relatively short time, and that it really is a very useful service to the Order united in General Chapter.

For now: Adiós, until the General Chapters."

APPENDIX I (a)
THE HOUSE REPORTS
AND THEIR TREATMENT AT THE MGM

A - Writing the House Reports

1.1 - The aim of the House Reports is to share with the whole Order the real state of the community. It is written by the community with its Superior in consultation with the Father Immediate. It is limited to a full page of text.

1.2 - In writing it, the community reflects on its own experience at this time, its evolution, the graces received and the challenges perceived. It does it normally through community dialogues and may use the recent Visitation Card.

B – Treatment of the House Reports at the Mixed General Meeting.

2. - The study of the House Reports is the main aspect of the collegial pastoral solicitude of the General Chapters towards the communities of the Order. The two General Chapters exercise that solicitude by confiding the reading and study of these House Reports, first to the Capitulants assembled according to the Regional Conferences to which they belong and then to the Mixed Commissions of the MGM.

a) Reading of the House Reports in Regional Meetings

2.1.1 - Assembled in Regional Meetings, the Capitulants share the situation of all the communities of their own Region. They do so essentially by reading the House Reports. They may also consult the last Visitation Card. If necessary they may consult the Father Immediate.

2.1.2 - On the basis of that sharing each Regional Meeting draws up a Regional Report giving a brief presentation of each community and a general overview of the Region with its own characteristics.

b) Study of some House Reports by the Mixed Commissions of the MGM

2.2 - From the House Reports assigned to them by the Abbot General and his Council, the Mixed Commissions will choose some of them to study. In choosing them, they will take into account the Regional Reports and the request that may be made to them by a Superior or Father Immediate.

2.2.1 - In that study, they will be sensitive for example to :

- The effective balance between *lectio*, liturgy and work.
- The Superior's pastoral care of the community. For example, the care of the aged and infirm members or of those in formation.
- How the community is facing certain challenges, such as that of inculturation, especially in the field of formation.
- The available means used by the superior to assure his or her own inner balance and growth.
- The relationship with the Father Immediate.
- In cases where an abbot has a large filiation, how he deals with this.

2.2.2 - The pastoral care for the communities studied and their superiors will normally be exercised through: advice, affirmation, encouragement, recommendations and brotherly/sisterly support. The Mixed Commissions may also choose to send a message to the community concerned.

2.2.3 - In exercising pastoral care of the community and its Superior, the Mixed Commission may take a decision and require its implementation in virtue of the authority delegated to it by both General Chapters. In such cases a majority vote of the Mixed Commission is required.

2.2.4 - Each Mixed Commission makes a report offering a general picture of the communities it has studied. In this report mention can be made of particular aspects or common features which could be of interest to the whole Order.

c) Situations requiring a special pastoral attention

2.3 - If the procedure to acquire necessary information becomes too time-consuming, the Mixed Commission can establish a sub-group from among its own members to continue the work. The results will be brought back to the Mixed Commission.

2.3.1 - There may be situations that invite further pastoral care due to the fact that:

- the pastoral care of the Mixed Commission is not accepted by the persons involved;
- more time and special interventions are needed in complicated situations.

2.3.2 - In such cases, after a written report to the Abbot General and having received his advice, the Mixed Commission will create an *ad hoc* commission that will include a member of the Council of the Abbot General and a Superior of the Region of the monastery being studied. The findings of that *ad hoc* commission will be brought to the Mixed Commission that will then make the necessary recommendations and eventually take the necessary decisions.

2.3.3 - If a Superior wishes to have recourse to the Plenary Assembly concerning a decision made by a Mixed Commission in his own regard or that of his community, he will do so through the Liaison Commission.

d) The Communication of Information

2.4 - A Liaison Commission composed of three members, appointed by the Central Commissions, will coordinate the transmission of information between the Mixed Commissions, the Abbot General, the Coordinating Commission and, if necessary, the Plenary Assembly

2.4.1 - The secretaries of the Mixed Commissions will regularly report to the Liaison Commission, giving a progress report on their work on the House Reports.

e) Report to the Plenary Assembly

2.5 - The regional reports as well as the reports of the Mixed Commissions, at the end of their work, will be communicated to the Plenary Assembly in the form judged most opportune by the Coordinating Commission.

C) State of the Order Document

3. A document giving a global vision, called "State of the Order" will be written by a group of three Capitulants chosen by the MGM. They will base their work on their reading of the House Reports and of the Regional Reports as well as on the reports of the Mixed Commissions and the work of the MGM in general.

APPENDIX I (b)

Practical Guide Concerning the treatment of the House Reports at the MGM

Concerning the writing of the House Reports

1. - In writing the House Reports, the community shall be attentive to its evolution during the last few years, its strengths and weaknesses and the prospects for its future. It should describe its Cistercian *conversatio* and avoid abstract reflections. As far as possible the whole community should be involved in its writing.

Concerning the treatment of the House Reports by the Regional Meetings and the Mixed Commissions

2. - During the treatment of a House Report, both by the Regional Meeting and by a Mixed Commission, the Father Immediate of the community concerned may be invited. He may also judge it useful or necessary, even before the study of the report, to draw the attention of the President of the Region or the President of the Mixed Commission to some aspects of the life of the community not mentioned in the report.

3. - Care should be taken at every stage, to respect the legitimate sensitivity of the superior of the house studied and of everyone concerned. If some sensitive information needs to be given to allow for an enlightened pastoral intervention, all the participants must be aware of their duty to respect charity and confidentiality.

4. - Each Region will appoint a secretary to write a regional report and to inform the Liaison Commission of the progress of its work.

5. - The regional reports will be printed and distributed to all the Capitulants. They should try to single out the common trends and features of monastic life in the communities of the region and identify particular problems that may be common to various monasteries of the region. These reports will serve as a background for the study of individual reports in the Mixed Commissions,

6. - At the beginning of the MGM, after their election, the presidents, vice-presidents and secretaries of the Mixed Commissions will have a meeting with a member of the Coordinating Commission in order to receive some indications on how to fulfil their tasks.

7. - The sub-group that a Mixed Commission may establish to study more in depth a particular situation should not be confused with the *ad hoc* commission that may be needed in some more delicate situations. Both the sub-group and the *ad hoc* commission must report to the Mixed Commission to which belongs the responsibility to take action.

8. - When making a decision concerning a community, the Mixed Commission will always do it by a majority vote and discuss it with the superior concerned. This should not be left to the very last days of the MGM. The Mixed Commission should also state clearly in writing the nature of the decision and its limits and foresee its follow up.

The role of the Liaison Commission

9. - The role of the Liaison Commission is to ensure smooth communication of information between the various agents and structures of the MGM. Everyone will be open to give them the information they need.

10. - The Liaison Commission will inform the Coordinating Commission of the progress of the work of each Region or Mixed Commission. It will be the channel for a Mixed Commission to bring a situation to the attention of the Abbot General and also for bringing back to the Mixed Commission the recommendations of the Abbot General.

11. - The secretaries of the Mixed Commissions having finished their work of the MGM will give to the Liaison Commission all the documentation that has been worked on in the Mixed Commissions. They will also note all the reports they have studied and inform the Liaison Commission

The State of the Order Document

12. - The document "State of the Order" will be written towards the end of the MGM, but early enough to allow for a study in Commissions and a discussion in Plenary Assembly.

13. - At the beginning of the MGM, in electing the Commission of three Capitulants entrusted with the writing of this document, a monk will first be elected, then a nun, and finally a third person, nun or monk.

APPENDIX II

Law Commission O.C.S.O.

Consultation concerning Cst 83.1

The Abbot General having requested the Law Commission to give its opinion on the interpretation of Cst 83.1, all the members of the said Commission were consulted and exchanged their opinions on the matter among themselves by e-mail. The Commission arrived at the following conclusions:

- 1) Under our present law, only someone who is or who has been an abbot in the Order can be elected Abbot General.
- 2) Clearly nothing prevents the General Chapter from modifying this Constitution if it judges it opportune to do so.

Elaboration and additional reflections

Re 1):

- a) The work done on the Constitutions at Holyoke and at El Escorial foresaw the possibility of the election of someone who was or who had been a "major superior" in the Order. Vote 361 of the MGM of 1987 restricted this possibility to someone who is or who had been "abbot". This new text was approved by the two General Chapters with a very big majority and was confirmed by the Holy See. That is our present legislation.
- b) What is said in Constitution 34.2, *"Everything said about an abbot applies equally to the prior of a priory unless explicit exception is made"*, cannot be applied here; for at least two reasons:
 - 1 – These two Constitutions are dealing with different things. The first deals with the nature of the power of the abbot (affirming that what is said of an abbot may also be said of a titular prior), the second sets out the conditions for being elected Abbot General.
 - 2 – These two Constitutions were voted on at different moments in the General Chapter. Cst 34.2, voted on in the first part of the Chapter, could not annul the restrictive vote 84.1, voted on towards the end of the Chapter.
- c) It is true that the reasons for the amendment introduced in 1987 are not evident and they do not appear in the minutes of the MGM. But it cannot be argued that the capitulants voted on this text without being aware of the amendment. They had the amended text (with the word abbas underlined) in front of them during all the voting session in which other aspects of the content of this Constitution were discussed. Furthermore, the text of this Constitution was at first rejected, on account of the inclusion of another amendment, before being approved without this other amendment.
- d) Consequently, a "broad interpretation" of this text, which would bring it back to the formula of 1984/1985, would not be an "interpretation" but rather a change in the law, annulling a vote of 1987 and modifying a text approved by the Holy See.

Re 2):

a) Nothing prevents the General Chapter from modifying Constitution 83.1 if it judges that such a change is pastorally opportune.

By way of indication, here is the position of the twelve Regional Conferences:

6 Regions did not address the question (REI, NED, CNE, REM, CAN, REMILA)

1 asks to maintain our current legislation (RÉCIF)

1 asks that the question be clarified (USA)

1 asks that a major superior might be elected (RE)

1 asks that a titular prior, a superior, or a superior *ad nutum* might be elected (ISLES)

2 that a prior might be elected (RAFMA, ORIENS)

b) It belongs to the Central Commission to decide whether this question should be put on the programme of the General Chapter of 2008. If it is, it will undoubtedly be by simplified procedure so as to be able vote on this question at the beginning of the Chapter. In this case the Central Commission will have to appoint someone to draw up a "working paper".

c) A two-thirds majority will be necessary in the General Chapter to modify a Constitution.

d) If this direction is taken, there is nothing which prevents the Procurator General from informing the CIVCSVA before the Chapter about this possibility, so that approval for the eventual change, if that happens, could be quickly obtained.

All the preceding reflects the unanimous opinion of the members of the Law Commission.

For the Law Commission



Armand Veilleux
President

APPENDIX III

Report concerning the communities of Belval, Grâce-Dieu and Igny for the Plenary Council of the Abbot General, Cardeña, June 2007

1. An informal group of abbesses and abbots from the East of France and Switzerland (Altbronn, Ubexy, Fille-Dieu, Grâce-Dieu, Igny, Cîteaux, Sept-Fons, Tamié, Oelenberg, Acey) having in the course of several meetings spoken about similar problems linked to the precarity of certain communities of nuns in the north and east of France, a meeting was organised at **Igny, in February 2006**, to talk about these questions.

This meeting brought together the abbesses of five communities of the east and north of France whose future seemed worrying: Altbronn, Ubexy, Belval, Grâce-Dieu and Igny, with their respective Fathers Immediate: Oelenberg, Sept-Fons, Mont-des-Cats, Acey and Cîteaux.

The Abbot General was present at this meeting as a guest, as well as M. Geneviève-Marie of Echourgnac, a member of the Commission of Aid for the community of Igny, and Dom Victor of Tamié, a member of the Commission of Aid for Grâce-Dieu.

A questionnaire had been sent to the communities of nuns in preparation for the meeting, proposing five points for reflection: an analysis of the facts, their interpretation, the solutions envisaged, the experience of the communities having put these solutions into practice, what had been done elsewhere. After a brief synthesis of the responses and discussions, a second questionnaire was drawn up to allow the abbesses to take the reflection further. Dom Bernardo proposed a "heptalogue" to aid in the discernment.

2. A second meeting took place at **la Grâce-Dieu at the beginning of August 2006**. M. Danièle and Dom Gérard of Melleray were present.

It emerged from this meeting that what was important at that moment was the work of understanding, of deepening the awareness of the situation of the communities.

Therefore we spoke about a "seniorate", about re-foundation, or about founding new communities, because we posed to ourselves the question: *is it possible to revivify the communities without combining their strengths?*

3. The next meeting took place in **Ubexy, in November 2006**. The Mother Prioress of the Dominicans of Dax, M. Véronique, was invited to tell us about her own experience: how two communities, that of Clairefontaine (in the Paris area) and that of Dax, in a precarious situation, came together to form a new community at Dax, a community which two other communities joined later on.

M. Véronique mentioned, *inter alia*:

- that the communities did not wait until the last minute to think about their situation;
- that the communities of Dax and Clairefontaine joined to do something together before being quite sure about the precise form it would take;
- that the dispersal of the sisters of Dax, during the time needed to modify the buildings to receive the sisters of Clairefontaine, made the two communities equal as regards the novelty of the location and of the project;
- that the coming together of the sisters on the same day in a new place meant *ipso facto* the birth of a new community,
- that the nomination of a Prioress, coming from another place, by the Master of the Order, and the discretion of the community of Dax allowed something truly new to begin;
- that one never hears "*we always did it like this...*" or similar remarks;
- that this project was conceived in faith: the sisters had not met each other before coming to Dax and had not visited the place before taking possession of it! Going forward in faith, without any guarantees, allowed them to be open to all the events which happened later.

After two years of this experience, following a canonical Visitation, Dax was declared a community in its own right: the election of a prioress took place, and a novitiate was opened.

This testimony of M. Véronique had a big impact on the reflection of the members of the group and of the communities.

At the end of the meeting at Ubexy it was decided to draw up a questionnaire to which all the sisters of the five communities would be invited to respond. A small group was elected to draw it up (Dom Patrick, Dom Guillaume and M. Danièle). This questionnaire, the broad outline of which was set out at the meeting, was submitted to each of the abbesses for any modifications before they themselves passed it on to their communities. During Advent the communities reflected and prayed; each one of the sisters was invited to talk it over with her abbess before responding to the questionnaire, the responses to which were to be submitted to Dom Guillaume by the end of December.

4. **From 2nd to 4th January 2007, at Belval** the small group of three met: they went through the questionnaire.

The replies were collated by community, then re-grouped into a first document. These replies were then interpreted by the members of the group and gave rise to three questions adapted to the situation of each of the communities. More general conclusions were drawn from these responses, taking into account the sisters aged 75 years and less in each of the communities, in regard to three important questions:

- 1 – We can continue here as we are for quite a while to come,
- 2 – We need other communities,
- 3 – We wish to try something with other communities.

On **4th and 5th January 2007**, the abbesses of the five communities and their Fathers Immediate met at Belval. The results were presented to them. Some corrections were made to the document involving the interpretation for each of the communities. Then the reflection focused on how to present the results to the various communities, on the possible scenarios to propose, and the next steps to be taken given that the communities had underlined a certain urgency to do something.

For the presentation to the communities, it was agreed that each abbess would give the results to her own community, and that the small group would go to the five communities at the end of January to comment on the results, get reactions, reply to questions, and explain the conclusions. Then the juridical and technical aspects of the question could be considered.

Four scenarios were proposed for the communities' consideration:

- 1 – the status quo, that each community continue in the same way as it was at the moment,
- 2 – the transfer of the Altbronn community (under consideration for a long time) to a place where, eventually, the other sisters could join them,
- 3 – the setting up of a "seniorate" and of another community at Igny, with the possibility for some sisters of going to a retirement home,
- 4 – the foundation of a new community in another place and a "seniorate" which could be envisaged at Igny.

These solutions were not presented as the only ones, there could certainly be other possibilities, but these are the ones which seemed most realistic.

The small commission carried out its tour of the five communities in two and a half days. In each one of them there was a meeting of an hour and a half:

- a brief résumé of what had happened since the meeting at Ubexy;
- clarification of an important point: that the commission had no power, it was simply there to aid reflection; each community is autonomous and therefore free and responsible for its own choices;
- response to questions.

5. The group met at **Altbronn, on 1st and 2nd March 2007** to try to discern what steps to take. A new questionnaire was drawn up, this time involving more commitment on the part of the communities, and from which it seemed it would be possible to move into a concrete phase. This questionnaire, given to each sister, was preceded by a "declaration", and by a six-point "chart", texts which explained and clarified what might be at issue.

6. The small group went through the questionnaire on **13th April, at Cîteaux, and on 14th April** the whole group met again.

The study was made in two ways: first, the number of votes for each question by monastery; then the division of the number of votes according to age groups. In this way it was seen that three communities: Belval, Grâce-Dieu and Igny, were interested in a common project, while Ubexy and Altbronn preferred to continue with their own particular projects.

For the common project, the idea of a seniorate at Igny was agreed. On the other hand, for the other sisters there was the question of knowing whether they would set up at Igny, in a place near to Igny, or elsewhere. It seemed, however, that the majority of the younger sisters wished to be some distance away.

After a time of reflection, during which the three abbesses met together, the following conclusions were arrived at:

- a vote would be taken in the three communities to formalise the common choice;
- after this vote, the superiors would meet individually with each sister of her own community to see what they envisaged for themselves personally;
- the work of our group was from then on finished, and it remained only to meet with Dom Bernardo in order to see what had to be done to make concrete the decisions taken by the communities.

7. **The meeting in Rome, 18th and 19th May 2007**, enabled us to decide what process to follow. After a discussion between the three abbesses, we came to the following conclusions:

- a canonical vote, aimed at the dissolution of the three monasteries, and the creation of one new community, at Igny, would be taken on the day of Pentecost; the bishop of the place should be informed of this;
- Dom Patrick would be charged with overseeing the proper carrying out of this process;
- the new group consisting of the superiors of the three communities, their Fathers Immediate, M. Danièle and Dom Patrick, would present a report to the Central Commissions;

- Dom Bernardo would ask the Law Commission, during the Central Commissions, to study the canonical aspects of this process, with a view to its being approved by the General Chapter of 2008 and by the Holy See;
- Mother Inès would be designated superior of the future community;
- Sr Marie-Noël of Echourgnac would be put in charge of the material aspects of the project;
- the 11th May 2008 would be chosen as the date of the creation of the new community at Igny.

8. **On 7th – 8th June 2007 at Igny**, the three abbesses shared the results of their community vote and of the individual meetings with the sisters of their own communities, which enabled them to plan the outlines of the new community. Sr Marie-Noël joined us on the evening of 7th June. A chart had been drawn up to clarify the direction of the project, which enabled us to envisage the renovations at Igny and the organisation of the new community. It insists on the fact that, even though there is indeed one single community, it will be made up of three groups with their own rhythms of life, their own different and proportionate places and activities. These three groups are defined in the chart. Dom Patrick is charged with supervising the process and with contacting competent persons. The three abbesses will meet with each of the communities, accompanied by the Father Immediate of the community concerned, to explain this chart, to reply to the questions of the sisters and to get their suggestions. Sr Marie-Noël has begun her consultations and has proposed a plan for carrying out the work. She will be assisted by Br Maurice of Tamié.

PARTICIPANTS IN THE CENTRAL COMMISSIONS 2007

1 The Abbot General, Dom BERNARDO Olivera

Promotrix and Vice-Promotor:

2 M. DANIELE Levrard
3 Dom EAMON Fitzgerald

Members of the Coordinating Commission:

4 M. BENEDICT Thissen
5 Dom ALEJANDRO Castro
6 Dom GUILLAUME Jedrzejczak

Superiors, delegates of the Regions:

7	ORIENS	M. CECILIA Aoki, Tenshien
8		Dom ANASTASIUS Li, Lantao
9	Canada	Dom BEDE Stockill, Calvaire
10	USA	Dom MARK Scott, Ava
11	REMILA	M. AURORA Chávez, El Encuentro
12		Dom JUAN ANTONIO Sánchez, Jarabacoa
13	ISLES	M. MARIE Fahy, Glencairn
14	NED	Dom MANU Van Hecke, Sint Sixtus
15	REI	Dom PATRICK Olive, Sept-Fons
16	CNE	Dom ARMAND Veilleux, Scourmont
17	RéCiF	Dom JEAN-MARIE Couvreur, Désert
18	RE	Dom MARCOS Garcia Díez, Cardaña
19	RAFMA	Dom JUDE Forcham, Bamenda
20		M. PHILOMÈNE Kalimbanya, Kibungo
21	REM	Dom GIACOMO Brière, Tre Fontane

Members of the Council of the Abbot General:

22		Dom TIMOTHY Kelly
		M. DANIELE Levrard
23		M. ANGELA Toyoda
24		Dom SANTIAGO Fidel Ordoñez
25		Dom CHARLES Amihere

Invited:

for some days: M. INÈS Gravier, Superior *ad nutum* of Belval
Sister PAMELA Clinton, Central Secretary for Formation

Interpreters:

26	French-English	Fr Gabriel Bertonière, Spencer
27	French-Spanish	Fr Antonio-Maria Martin Fernandez Callardo, Saint Isidro
28	English-French	Sr Laurence Gouezin, Campénéac
29	English-Spanish	Fr Laurence Curran, O. Cist., Valdedios
30	Spanish-French	Br Eric Antoine, Aiguebelle
31	Spanish-English	Fr Martin Charles, Miraflores

Secretaries:

32	English	Sr Eleanor Campion, Glencairn
33	French	Sr Madeleine Gendry, Échourgnac
34	Spanish	Sr MaríaSther Briso-Montiano, Carrizo/Wrentham

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