

ABBEY OF NOTRE-DAME DE CITEAUX  
F-21700 SAINT-NICOLAS-LES-CITEAUX

May 15, 2019

*To the members of the “Cîteaux Mater Nostra” Association  
To the superiors of the communities of the Cistercian Family  
To the leaders of Cistercian lay communities*

Dear Reverend Father, Dear Reverend Mother,  
Dear brothers and sisters, religious and lay, living in the Cistercian grace,

On March 21, 1998, the celebration of the ninth centenary of the foundation of Cîteaux brought together at the place that is the wellspring of the Cistercian Family about 800 monks and nuns belonging to all our Orders and Congregations. It was truly a day of grace and thanksgiving that deeply strengthened the communion already at work in our great Family.

As we prepare to celebrate the ninth centenary of the Charter of Charity, I address myself once again to all the Cistercian communities around the world to keep them informed of the ongoing reflection that has been under way in Cîteaux for three years, focusing on the idea of developing the site from which the great Cistercian movement began. I would not venture to address you without the support of the chief leaders of our Orders and Congregations who are co-signing this letter. It is therefore with their support and encouragement that I am turning to you, believing that the project that is being set up here at the fountainhead of the Cistercian Family can become a strong sign of the Charity that underlay the birth of Cîteaux and its development.

Here follows the history of this project:

On May 2 and 3, 2017, about thirty brothers and sisters of the Cistercian Family responded to my invitation to meet in Cîteaux to reflect together on the future of the site, the birthplace of our whole Family. Among them were the Abbots General and Prioresses General of our Orders and Congregations, as well as a representative of the Cistercian Lay Fraternities and certain professional advisers who are friends of Cîteaux.

Dom Eamon Fitzgerald, the OCSO Abbot General, gave a report on this meeting in No. 113 of the AIM Bulletin.

On May 7 and 8, 2018, the same group, expanded by a few new members, met again at Cîteaux. In the presence of the Abbey's notary, the group officially constituted itself into an Association called "*Cîteaux Mater Nostra*", whose main purpose is to make of Cîteaux more of a place where the Cistercian Family can remember its origin, come on pilgrimage, and bear witness to its charismatic sense of the place. Among these projects, two are particularly emblematic: the restoration of the Definitory—a historical witness of the unity of the Cistercian Family—and the creation of an oratory in the very place where our founders dedicated themselves to prayer.

On 11 and 12 April, 2019, the *Cîteaux Mater Nostra Association* held its first ordinary general assembly at Cîteaux, in the presence of the Generals of our Orders and Congregations, as in previous years. Martin Bacot, Chief Architect of the Historical Monuments Commission of the Burgundy Region, presented us with a possible programme for the redevelopment of the Definitory. Jean-Marie Duthilleul, an architect specializing in train stations and churches who enjoys a great reputation in France and beyond, helped us to reflect on the various possible traffic patterns on the site, and on what a small oratory could look like on the site of the first church of Cîteaux.

At the end of this plenary meeting, a vote was taken which shows that the Association is very clearly in favour of continuing the project. You will readily imagine that it will be necessary to find financial support for it. It is not easy for me as Abbot of Cîteaux to broach such a subject, but I have been asked to do it nonetheless. This is what I can say at this time:

Since the Definitory is an officially registered Historical Monument, we will be able to obtain substantial subsidies from the French State. In addition, the Heritage Foundation and other bodies, particularly regional ones, have already informed us that they will also stand by to aid in the restoration of the Definitory. That said, it became clear during our discussions that, in order to move forward in this direction, it is also indispensable that the communities of the Cistercian family, too, commit themselves to supporting this project, which amounts to at least 10 million euros.

On a personal note, I would like to add the following. When we invited the Generals of the Cistercian Family and some other monks, nuns and lay people, to meet in Cîteaux in May 2017 to reflect together on the future of the site, my community brothers and I were far from imagining that the exchanges would

take the direction outlined above. We were all surprised to see these perspectives emerging in a discernment in which dialogue flowed freely. We can say that these were days of grace and joy when we perceived the breath of the Spirit passing among us.

The project taking shape is intended as a new sign of the communion that unites our great Family. Those who co-sign this letter with me hope that you will welcome it. We entrust it to your prayer and that of your communities.

*Dom Olivier Quenardel*  
*Abbot of Cîteaux*

Dom Mauro-Giuseppe Lepori  
Abbot General, OCist

Dom Eamon Fitzgerald  
Abbot General, OCSO

M. Angelines de Frutos Benito, Abbess President  
Congregation of St Bernard, Spain

M. Noëlla Ghijs, Prioress General  
Bernardines of Oudenaarde

M. Mary Helen Jackson, Prioress General  
Bernardines of Esquermes

To make concrete our common desire to realize the project fully, we suggest you commit yourself to each of these 3 points, specifying your choices below:

**Gift of prayer:** It is God that unites us. If we come together before God in this Life project, we would be implementing the Prologue of the Rule: "First of all, present your need to Him by a very brief prayer so that he may bring to a successful conclusion everything you undertake." We could, for example, offer a day of prayer with the intention that our place of origin become a focus of communion and a place of pilgrimage and shared memory.

**Gift of Communication:** We are surrounded by a wealth of networks of communication. Informing your family and friends about our common project would be a great help. For example, when we send community news, we could inform our loved ones about this project so that our birthplace might become a place of communion, pilgrimage and shared memory.

**Financial gift:** We would of course appreciate donations of large sums; but gifts of any size by a large number of communities of our Cistercian Family seem to us essential. We can send directly to *Cîteaux Mater Nostra* our own donations and/or those made to us by people close to us who would like to help the Association collect the necessary sums. Alternately, this could possibly be done through each Generalate.

\* \* \*

Our community: \_\_\_\_\_

Contributes to the *Cîteaux Mater Nostra* project as follows:

The gift of prayer of: \_\_\_\_\_

The gift of communication of: \_\_\_\_\_

The financial gift of: \_\_\_\_\_