

**MEETING OF
THE REGION OF THE ISLES**

5 – 8 MARCH 2024



**MOUNT ST JOSEPH ABBEY
ROSCREA, COUNTY TIPPERARY, IRELAND**

Daily Prayer

Loving and Gracious God, you are indeed the giver of all good gifts and we thank you today for all your blessings. God our Father Lord, we are meeting this week as the Region of the Isles to conduct matters of business for the region and the Cistercian Order, we strongly believe we are in your presence. We seek your glory first in all we do together. Guide our hearts and our minds in the spirit of fairness, right thought and speech. Impart Your supreme wisdom upon our activities so that our affairs may reach a successful conclusion each day and that the meeting will be a grace filled time for all of us gathered here. Thank You for being our source of guidance today. Amen.



Participants

MEMBERS	SUPERIOR	DELEGATE
Whitland	M. Jo	
Tautra	M. Brigitte	Sr Renata
St Mary's, Glencairn	M. Marie	Sr Mairead
Nunraw	D. Mark	Br Michael
Munkeby	D. Joel	
Mount St Joseph, Roscrea		Fr Malachy (prior)
Mount St Bernard	D. Joseph	Br Bernard John
Mount Melleray		Fr John (prior)
Mellifont	D. Rufus (Monastic Commissary)	Br Andrew (prior)
Caldey	D. Jan	Br Luca
Bolton		
Bethlehem	D. Aelred	

Guests

Sr Mary Helen (Hynning, Bernardines)
Sr Maria (Brownshill, Bernardines)
Dom Anastasius (Abbot General's Council)

Secretary

Sr Kathleen (Mississippi)

Absences

Dom Michael, superior of Bolton, and Sr Usia, delegate of Whitland, sent their regrets that at the last minute they were not able to attend, due to illness.

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Votes

1. We wish that new superiors be given an introductory day at the beginning of the General Chapter to encourage participation in the commissions and in the aula so that all cultures be heard

Yes: 9 **No:** 0 **Abs:** 1

2. We ask that the Coordinating Commission encourage members from all cultures/language to exercise their right and freedom to participate in the aula during the General Chapter

Yes: 10 **No:** 0 **Abs:** 0

3. We ask that the Bursar of the Order give a report on the new financial structure during the General Chapter of 2025

Yes: 9 **No:** 0 **Abs:** 1

4. We ask that the General Chapter be celebrated outside of Europe on a regular basis

Yes: 10 **No:** 0 **Abs:** 0

5. We ask that the General Chapter be celebrated outside of Europe every 3rd Chapter

Yes: 5 **No:** 4 **Abs:** 1

6. We ask that the General Chapter be celebrated outside of Europe every 4th Chapter

Yes: 4 **No:** 5 **Abs:** 1

Votes 5 and 6 are mutually exclusive

7. We wish that the General Chapter include a retreat day, or short reflections from the delegates, or some periodic guided reflection/meditation to help enhance the spiritual dimension

Yes: 9 **No:** 0 **Abs:** 1

8. We wish that the opening and closing Masses, and the conferences given during the General Chapter, be live-streamed (or recorded) for the communities to strengthen the link between communities and the GC

Yes: 10 **No:** 0 **Abs:** 0

9. We wish that the Abbot General's Council review and clarify the Order's understanding and application of 'Confidentiality and Transparency' in what concerns the General Chapter

Yes: 9 **No:** 0 **Abs:** 1

10. We wish that the Regional delegates be encouraged to send appropriate reflections regularly from the General Chapter to the communities of the Regions

Yes: 8 **No:** 1 **Abs:** 1

11. We wish to retain the name Father Immediate/Mother Immediate

Yes: 7 **No:** 3 **Abs:** 0

12. We wish to change the name to 'Superior Immediate'

Yes: 1 **No:** 7 **Abs:** 0

13. We wish to change the name to 'Immediate'

Yes: 1 **No:** 7 **Abs:** 0

(Votes 11, 12, 13 are mutually exclusive)

14. We ask that for communities which need to change filiation, any community (nuns or monks) could ask any other community of the Order (nuns or monks) to accept the "paternity"

Yes: 8 **No:** 1 **Abs:** 1

15. We ask that a report on their experience be given by those presently acting as Mother Immediate at the General Chapter 2025

Yes: 10 **No:** 0 **Abs:** 0

16. We ask that communities now having a Mother Immediate share their experience with the General Chapter in 2025

Yes: 10 **No:** 0 **Abs:** 0

17. We ask that some years be given to experience Mothers Immediate in the Order, leading to an evaluation at the General Chapter 2028, before any change is considered in the legislation

Yes: 10 **No:** 0 **Abs:** 0

18. We wish to produce a Cistercian/Bernardine Yearbook for internal use within the Region of the Isles

Yes: 9 **No:** 0 **Abs:** 1

19. We wish to expand the role of the Regional Secretary of Formation to include: the Initial Formation Course, a biennial formators' meeting, and an annual online formation course

Yes: 10 **No:** 0 **Abs:** 0

20. We wish that juniors, novices, postulants and recently solemnly professed be invited to participate in the Initial Formation Course, at the discretion of the novice director and superior

Yes: 9 **No:** 1 **Abs:** 0

21. We wish that the Regional Secretary for Formation be given an assistant to meet the needs of the Region in the area of initial formation and ongoing formation

Yes: 9 **No:** 1 **Abs:** 0

22. We wish that the Regional Secretary for Formation be invited to the Regional Meetings for one day

Yes: 10 **No:** 0 **Abs:** 0

23. We wish to set up a central fund for formation

Yes: 9 **No:** 1 **Abs:** 0

Full Minutes

This section of the minutes deals with preparation for the Central Commission meeting, and ultimately for the General Chapter of 2025. A set of questions was developed based on material proposed by Dom Bernardus. Each question (except question 6) was assigned to two or three houses of the region for community discussion. Those attending the regional meeting gave presentations based on the community discussions.

Most of the presentations are given here in the body of the full minutes, but a few which were longer have been placed in the Appendices.

Questions

To prepare the Central Commission Meeting in Chili, June 2024

1. Overview / Executive Summary of all the Financial Documentation in relation to the restructuring of the Order's finance based on the documentation supplied to date.
2. How could the Order function better given its international reality?
3. Until now, the Order has been too much focused on the European zone. How can we find solutions for greater participation by communities and members outside Europe?
4. To avoid the General Chapter becoming too much of a "law meeting" or "voting machine", how could superiors work more on the spiritual and pastoral level during the Chapter?
5. Links between communities and the General Chapter: how can communities be more involved in the General Chapter, and not just their superiors?
6. General Chapter 2025: end of term for several Council members. Proposal of new names?
7. On the function and role of the Secretary for Formation in the Regions. How do you see his/her service? New wishes?

Evaluation of the General Chapter 2022

POINTS FROM THE OPEN FORUM DISCUSSION.

- The overall experience was very positive. There was a good atmosphere.
 - The atmosphere at the February meeting was especially good; there was time for quiet and prayer. Perhaps also because there were fewer people?
 - The difference with September was quite noticeable: the speed was up, there was a large number of people.
- The meeting room and accommodations were very good
- Many spoke of the need for more quiet and reflection. But at the same time, there is hardly time to finish everything. Is there some way to improve the structure, find a better balance and yet still accomplish what is necessary?
- There was consensus that the 2022 Chapters were very well organized.
- House Reports
 - Difficult house reports were ably dealt with.
 - Some commissions seem less supportive of the superiors whose house reports they are studying, than others. The Chapter should normally be a place where the superiors are strengthened and encouraged in their ministry.
- Tensions.
 - It is healthy that we deal with the difficulties. If everything is good and flat, it means the problems are not coming out.
 - It is also good to find reconciliation by the end of the Chapter. It was beautiful in 2022 when someone asked for forgiveness at the end of the Chapter.
- Suggestions
 - Expand the training for participation, for new superiors and delegates, including how to function as presidents or secretaries of commissions
 - Remind all, that the secretary is simply recording what was said, and is not the one responsible for the remarks recorded.
 - Ad hoc committees: if there are detailed papers to be dealt with, could they be prepared more in advance?
 - Some matters being dealt with in the aula perhaps needed more discrete handling outside the plenary session.

SUMMARY by Fr Malachy: Overall feelings toward the last General Chapter are positive. The new Abbot General brought his style of leadership: there was a lot of clarity, and he helped people move along and understand the events. But there is also an underlying feeling that the workload is very intense, that there is not enough time for prayer and reflection to assist people in their participation.

Financial Structures of the Order

PRESENTATION: Fr Malachy – SEE APPENDIX 1

Some additional comments by Fr Malachy:

At present the Order has three standing commissions dealing with finances:

- Commission of Aid
- Commission of Finance
- Commission of the Finances of the Generalate

At the 2022 Chapter I was on the ad hoc committee on finance. My personal point of view is that the documents are needed ahead of time. It is difficult being presented with material from three different bodies, with different styles, different degrees of transparency, and they need to be harmonized.

The Central Commission meeting online in 2023 produced several documents about finance [distributed at this meeting]. Since the General Chapter we have received from the Abbot General a review on the financials of the Order [distributed earlier].

Every community in the Region should be up to date on financial procedures. The onus is on us religious communities to follow civil law.

The audit at the Regular Visitation is in the Statute on Temporal Administration, but it is rarely carried out, or if it was, not rigorously. Where we're going now is very good; it is imperative that accounts be audited. If not, a community could get into financial difficulties very quickly, and not even know it.

We will have to take into account the ability of the visitor and the size of the community. There will need to be flexibility. The Visitor may not always have the ability to understand an audit. If this audit is produced by an external auditor, but does not fit our OCSO requirements, then we have to wonder about our audit.

POINTS FROM THE DISCUSSION

Financial Report for the Visitor (See Appendix 2)

- Those attending the recent course for New Superiors were given a list of all the documents which should be presented at the Regular Visitation: leases, deeds, list of members & their jobs. It's an occasion to put it all together.
- Those communities obliged to give the civil authority an annual official audit do not need to produce a full new audit for the visitation. But the Visitor has to have the assistance of someone who can understand the numbers.

- We can't expect every community to have a monk or nun, let alone the superior, to have this kind of financial expertise. We usually need to have an outside professional person to oversee community finances. There are many things now that have to be done because of civil law; the same is happening parishes and other institutions in the Church. By analogy we should be looking at these matters.
- There is need for a Financial Visitation. This is more than looking at the accounts. Another part is looking at economics: what do you do, how is it working: for example, what is your main income? It could be, not your business, but pensions, rents. How do you understand your income, expenses, in a broader context than just accounts (which are of course important!). A broader view for the Visitor & for community.
- When a community has multiple businesses, it is important to be able to tell if some are ahead financially, some behind.
- Accounts are always looking backward. To avoid problems, it is necessary also to look at the future, where are things going. How are things changing in the community's finances?

Financial Structures of The Order (See Appendix 3)

- The Order has made great strides in moving toward what is required by international best practice.
- One goal is to have things as transparent as possible: no "hidden treasures" somewhere. Finance is a complex matter but needs to be made as simple as possible.
- Should funds be combined into one? Sometimes it's clearer when they are separate, so one can see what movements are going on. Combined accounts can hide those things.
- There is a consensus that, while the new structure proposed by the "Toward the Future" document should operate ad experimentum until the General Chapter of 2028, it would be good to have a report already at the 2025 Chapter.
- It is likely there will be a new Statute after some years of experimentation.
- *The Financial Commissions – sub commissions*
 - In the past, the members were elected by the General Chapter for six-year terms, but it seems now the Abbot General is appointing them? It seems this is a key function of the Chapter.
 - The Statute on Temporal Administration #33.b reads "The Abbot General... appoints a finance commission to administer the capital of the Order."
 - The question was raised why the Abbot General had appointed (rather than Chapter elect) the members of the commissions / sub commissions, and Dom Anastasius replied that the members are indeed elected, but the Abbot General at this point appointed people who were elected at the last Chapter.
 - It would help if the capitulants had a list of suggested people ahead of the Chapter.
 - The "Commission of Mutual Aid" has been renamed "Commission of Solidarity."

- The bank account for the “Aid” commission is with the Vatican, while the account for “Finance” is with an Italian bank. Because of the bad reputation the Vatican bank acquired, foreign banks require far more paper work to deal with the Vatican bank. This makes it more difficult to make donations to the commission.
- *The Bursar of the Order*
 - The person holding this position is appointed by the Abbot General.
 - An advantage of having the Abbot General appoint, is that he knows people personally. Of course, others can also suggest people.
 - Perhaps the Bursar of the Order should have an assistant or substitute, in case he becomes incapacitated.
 - Money gives power to a person; it can be good to spread that power.
 - With the structure of sub commissions, the bursar actually does not have that much control of the finances; it is primarily a coordinating role. Also, if he or she is incapacitated, most of the needed information is still available in the sub commissions.

The International Character of the Order

Increasing the Participation of Non-European Members

Questions 2 and 3 are both treated in this section.

Question 2: How could the Order function better, given its international reality?

PRESENTATION 1: Dom Jan, Caldey

1. The international reality of the Order was there from the very beginning. One of our three founders, Stephen, was English, the others were French. During the life time of St Bernard, the Order spread all over Europe: France, Great Britain, Ireland, the Low Countries, Germany, Scandinavia etc... In the twentieth century, the Order spread all over the world, Asia, Africa, the Americas, Oceania. One would think that the Order might know how to work internationally by now.
2. The international reality of the Order is also a fact in many of our monasteries. On Caldey we have at the moment a community of 8 monks of 6 different nationalities. This gives us a rich experience of diversity. It also comes with its challenges. It needs a constant awareness of this diversity, without falling into the trap of cultural prejudices and generalisations. We need the humility to learn to adapt to a different cultural environment and the courage to help each other to fit in better. Sometimes language might be an issue, sometimes a different approach to or vision of things. We have to show respect to each one's contribution. We are all solitary inclined, but there is a fine line between solitude and loneliness. Homesickness can be an issue. So the better we live as a community the better we make everyone welcome. We have to take 1 Cor 12-13 as our guide. There are many talents and gifts, but there is only one Spirit and love should be the driving force of all we do or say.
3. We would like the Order to encourage communities to lend out monks or sisters more instead of making foundations. Perhaps there will be a need to adjust the constitutions and statutes.
4. Hi-tech solutions like zoom can be a help.
5. We don't consider the international reality of the Order as a problem to be solved, but rather than an inspiring challenge.

PRESENTATION 2: Dom Mark & Br Michael, Nunraw

1. There is a limitation for us: we are not an international community but very UK: monks from England, Scotland, Ireland. This probably makes us a bit more insular and narrow at times.
2. Our community felt it would have been helpful to know the concerns which brought on this question.

3. Using zoom is an obvious way of connecting.
4. At a number of General Chapters, some of the African houses met in Rome just before. Perhaps this could be expanded in some way?

PRESENTATION 3: Dom Joel, Munkeby

The international dimension of the Order exists already. The place of the regions. Internationality in the Order's structures: General Chapter; Central Commission, council of the Abbot General.

Moreover, the situation is complex. When we talk about internationality, we are dealing with very diverse realities. The new world, America, is not the old world, Europe, even if the two, at least as far as North America is concerned, are considered together as the West; South America is not Africa. Asia is not Oceania or Australia.

Strengthening the regions to live the charism in the different continents was a question at the last General Chapter, but there can be great distances and cultural differences in the same region (Africa, Asia).

To avoid dependence of one region on another. With the case of Africa and Europe and economic dependence of African houses in relation to the founding houses in Europe. Sometimes it is the status quo which is preferred. A need of security? But these links can also be an expression of the Charter of Charity. Example at the last General Chapter concerning the resignation of an abbot of a house in Europe, which caused a sort of panic among some of the African superiors. The proposal was in some case for the Africans to follow up each other (it didn't raise much enthusiasm).

Aid in the spirit of the Charter of Charity can be reversed. Madagascar sisters from Ampibanjinana come to help their founding house in Campénéac, which is in line with their culture of respect and care for elders and gives them a better understanding of where they come from and their historical roots, which is part of their identity.

Encourage transversally links between the regions for mutual knowledge and mutual support.

Perhaps this encroaches on the question of Eurocentrism, but it cannot be denied that historically the Order was born in Europe and that its history is part of its identity. We must be wary of a certain "wokism" that would tend to erase any reference to history under the pretext of doing away with colonialism, or even racism. We have to recognize that the European culture is still dominating in many respects and that must change; but we must also be cautious about too easily absorbing the "woke" culture and its ideas of systematic repression.

In our Cistercian-Trappist tradition, something of the uniformity that was recommended in the primitive texts of Cîteaux and based on the Rule of Saint Benedict, remains. This means that in all the houses of the Order, despite the differences of context, there is a unity of lifestyle and structure. If enough flexibility is allowed for adaptation, this can be a source of richness and strengthens unity.

Basically, by faith, we are all children of God, in Christ through baptism, and "worldly" criteria are erased or at least relativized: "There can be neither Jew nor Greek, there can be neither bond nor free, there can be no male and female: for we all are one man in Christ Jesus", says Saint Paul in the epistle to the Galatians (3, 28). The abbot should not discriminate between people in the monastery. Let him not love one more than the other unless he finds him better in his deeds and obedience. Let him not prefer the free man to the one who comes from servile status, unless there is a reasonable cause for this. RB 2. Rank in the community was not determined by sociological criteria in a society that was nevertheless very hierarchical. The criterion is monastic, the moment of entry into the monastery, which corresponds to the moment of conversion.

Whatever our national or cultural affiliation, we have a basic fraternity in Christ which is expressed for us in the Cistercian charism, concretely this should be expressed in the fact that everyone has their place and right to speak in the Order.

Question 3: Until now the Order has been too much focused on the European zone. How can we find solutions for greater participation by communities and members outside Europe?

PRESENTATION 1: M. Jo, Whitland – SEE APPENDIX 4

PRESENTATION 2: Dom Aelred, Portglenone.

- We should be clear for ourselves what "participation" means, and in what, or at what level.
- Non-European communities must be asked how they see their participation and membership in the Order being valued or extended in a new way – what do they bring to the Order's life which European/Western communities do not? This is a matter of intra-culturation, especially in regard to formation for the interior life and cultural nourishment. What do they see as a new and worthwhile way of participating in the Order's life and mission which is not at the moment present or realised?
- Abbots/superiors from Africa/Philippines/Oceania etc. taking on roles of FI, visitation and responsibilities regarding houses in need of intervention/pastoral support.
- Greater consultation re roles and responsibilities amongst non-European communities?
- General Chapter to be celebrated regularly outside Europe?

PRESENTATION 3: Dom Joseph, Mt St Bernard

- Venue of General Chapter: consider holding the chapter in other regions apart from Europe e.g. Asia and Africa
- Do those outside Europe feel the need for greater participation? Already there is participation of non-European houses in the Administration at the Generalate e.g. the current Procurator General Dom Athanasius Li from Lantao, and others.
- Offer greater support for the development and growth of communities outside Europe, especially in Africa. Though there is a problem now in European houses of a lack of personnel who could give this support.
- In the UK it is hard to obtain visas for exchange programme e.g. sponsoring students to come and do studies.
- Invite monks and nuns from Asia, Africa and South America to give retreats, talks, courses, visitations, etc. in European houses. But there needs to be a way for those capable of doing this to be known.
- Could the community of Awhum become a centre for training for the African region?

POINTS FROM THE DISCUSSIONS

- *Original International Character of the Order.*
 - It didn't always go smoothly in the early centuries; for example, getting people to come to the General Chapter was a problem. There was even violence: monks wanting to hold on to the Celtic tradition.
 - It might be interesting for scholars to look into what the problems were from beginning.
 - The Order was founded in France. The globalization of the Order is the result of European monasteries making foundations.
- *General Reflections*
 - REMILA, RAFMA, Oriens, are the regions growing most, with the youngest average age, biggest number in formation.
 - Greater participation from those outside Europe will happen naturally, because eventually people from these regions will outnumber the Europeans.
 - Our headquarters are in Rome, as for all Orders; this has a psychological effect, since where your headquarters are you tend to regard as the center. Imagine if our headquarters were e.g. in Tokyo.
 - A very important question for fragile communities: instead of asking how we survive as a community, looking outside ourselves to the Order as a whole.

- In the Trappist tradition we retain more of the uniformity of the Cistercian beginnings than in the O. Cist. When you travel to a community on another continent you find the same structure of life; you are at home everywhere. This is particularly important for the new generation: they prefer a clear identity and uniformity, more than diversity.
- *Participation during the General Chapter*
 - There is a disparity: the contributions from the floor are predominantly from the European sphere. Non-Europeans contribute less even in the commissions.
 - Suggestion: an invitation at the beginning of the General Chapter, encouraging people to speak even if they have language difficulties. It could be especially helpful to encourage new superiors.
- *What else is already being done to include non-Western cultures in the structure of the Order?*
 - Non-Western members holding major responsibilities: Dom Bernardo Olivera of Argentina, Abbot General for 18 years; the Central Secretary of Formation, Fr Mauricio.
 - The Abbot General's Council: for some decades now, it has good representation from around the globe.
 - Meetings outside Europe: The Central Commission meeting in Chile this year.
 - Father Immediate, or making the Regular Visitation, being done within Africa or Asia, rather than by Westerners.
 - Illah recently accepted Nsugbe to make their Visitation.
 - Non-Westerners as presenters
 - As an Order we have moved in the right direction.
 - At the last Chapter we had speakers from Mokoto and Quilvo.
 - Dom Bosco (Victoria) gave a presentation at the recent course for new superiors – the first non-European.
- *What else could be done?*
 - Ask the non-Europeans what their gifts are, how their contribution could be extended or valued in a new way.
 - Standing commissions in the Order could have a more international character than at present, as the Abbot General's council already does.
 - Cross-cultural relations between communities: Fathers Immediate, Visitation, other advisory capacities. A few concrete suggestions:
 - Establish a core group of Visitors from various cultures; a community might have the Visitation from a member of this core group who is from a different culture. There could be a fund to cover costs for travel and for a translator.
 - Twinning monasteries of different regions so they'd get to know one another: sharing resources for formation, using zoom, recording classes. Example of twinning: Glencairn and Abakaliki, Mount St Bernard and Bamenda: following what is happening with them takes you out of your own insulation.

- One big challenge to participation in the aula is the language.
- This is also true in some Regional Meetings. For example, the Oriens region uses English, but also takes the time to translate into Japanese. Since English is not the native language of the region, some are hesitant to speak. It is easier to have something prepared rather than speak spontaneously.
- Suggestion: develop language skills on an Order-wide level.
 - For example, it could be good for the Order to help some in Japan to learn one of the three official languages; then they might be able to participate more in the General Chapter.
 - Translators: It is very difficult to recruit translators for the General Chapter, or the course for new superiors, also to find secretaries.
- It would be helpful to provide translations of the Cistercian Fathers, but also of more recent literature, into other languages.
- *Multi-cultural communities and guests from other monasteries*
 - We have to accommodate them to our own monastery and vice versa. Sometimes we might incorporate what they are used to: we might be surprised at how good we find it.
 - Before receiving someone into our community, find out what their skills are and see if we can fulfill them work-wise.
- *The Bernardine experience*
 - For the last 20 years, there has been an international element on the council.
 - At the General Chapter, sisters from Congo were lamenting about how squashed their monasteries are; they need more physical space. At the same time, the Europeans are saying, we need more people. In our congregation, stability is to the congregation, not to a particular house. But the Africans reacted strongly to the suggestion of sending sisters to the houses in Europe: they want to be where there is future life, not go to European houses to help them hang on for a few more years.

SUMMARY by Fr Malachy

- Our communities are all making efforts to respect people from other cultures and make them feel welcome, recognizing the challenges they face within a community.
- One challenge: the majority of contributions at the Chapter seem to be from the northern hemisphere.
- There is room for improvement especially in assisting those without great competency in any of our three official languages.
- There is need to translate foundational texts into additional languages.
- Perhaps the biggest challenge for decentralization would be to host the General Chapter outside Europe.

- The consensus seems to be, the Order is functioning reasonably well at the international level; in particular, there is a conscious effort to represent different cultures. But it would be interesting to see the responses to this question from other cultures, and to listen to what *they* are saying about this question. We may think the Order is doing well, but perhaps other cultures think we are doing rather poorly.

How can the General Chapter be more spiritual?

Question 4. To avoid the General Chapter becoming too much of a "law meeting" or "voting machine", how could superiors work more on the spiritual and pastoral level during the Chapter?

PRESENTATION 1: M. Marie – SEE APPENDIX 5

PRESENTATION 2: Sr Renata

It is difficult to answer this when you have little or no experience of being at the Chapter. Perhaps questions from the House Reports could be looked at to provide greater focus of care for communities.

Even if the pastoral care is very strong and good there needs to be a channel for more pastoral element overall, so superiors could share their problems with others.

Add 3 more days to the Chapter calendar - not at the end - for pastoral exchange and discussion. In the aula? In large groups? It would be useful to know the theme in advance, for example: addiction in communities (alcohol, money, work), ageing and increasing physical incapacity, bullying... and so address ways of dealing with them pastorally.

To have a “day of retreat / recollection” with someone (Dom Mauro Lepori) giving two lectures (morning-afternoon).

To be attentive to respect the silence in the bedroom during day and night. MARK

Last Chapter, a lot of time on Cor Orans, maybe made it seem heavier. Esp. monks, not as familiar, so it seemed too heavy. Not having that this time may make things lighter.

PRESENTATION 3: Dom Aelred

Pope Francis says, synodality has a style. The General Chapter could adopt style of synodality. Yes, it must be juridical, but it's not a secular body. The style should be the Cistercian style: respect, discernment according to the movement of Spirit, otherwise, it's just a legislative act.

Also, because we are an Order characterized by listening to Word of God, maybe once a week there could be selected Scripture texts, common lectio divina, to permeate continued prayer – perhaps to be brought into deliberations. The underlying recognition is the need for ongoing formation also for superiors. How does the General Chapter become a formative experience for superiors? Inviting, encouraging conversion. Perhaps in the middle of the

Chapter, maybe three days of prayer, someone invited to speak. Maybe commissions would continue some quiet work, but in a spirit of quiet, peace.

The juridical & legislative must stay, but we need more formation by the Word of God.

Some concrete suggestions:

- Silent prayer/adoration of the Blessed Sacrament inserted into the programme, and available to all
- Regional groupings/language groupings being brought together for common lectio divina, and meeting frequently throughout the celebration of the General Chapter
- House reports only which need attention, and more space/time for presentation of thematic talks on aspects of the life
- In-Chapter seminars from which superiors could choose and which they might attend, so that the General Chapter also has something of the character of a conference
- What can we learn from the governance annual/regular meetings of other Orders and institutes, both monastic and apostolic?
- Insert a quasi-retreat in the General Chapter's second/third week – an invited preacher to give one spiritual conference each day, for 5 days, a greater observance of silence and times of reflection, plenary congregations limited and reduced ... which would shift, even momentarily, the accent of the gathering away from juridical to spiritual.

POINTS FROM THE DISCUSSION

- *Preparation for the Chapter.*
 - A huge amount of work has gone into preparing all the material distributed in advance. Those who will attend must dedicate quality time to read and prepare – a challenge, but also a serious obligation.
 - House Reports: could they be distributed in advance to the relevant commissions? This would permit reflection and questions to be raised in advance and reduce the time spent during the Chapter.
 - Website: perhaps there could be a website just for Chapter preparation, so the superiors can download the documents as they become available.
 - Regional zoom meetings: the superiors of a region could have a one-day zoom meeting close to the time of the Chapter, to aid in preparation.
 - Community participation: in the past, documents came out before the General Chapter and were discussed in community in draft stages. Would it be possible for the Law and Finance commissions to put out more material before the Chapter?
- *What is already in place?*
 - There is always a day out. Some go to see the Pope; some do something else. A chance for relaxation.
 - Taking off on Sunday seems in character with who we are.
 - It is possible to skip supper, pray Vespers on one's own, have time alone.

- *Suggestions*
 - It's the style of operating the Chapter, more than the content, which might make a difference in the spiritual quality.
 - Guided reflection. Every week, or every few days, everyone in the aula together have a guided review of the past week or past few days, on how everyone personally has experienced the Chapter. A reflection about one's personal experience.
 - A day of recollection. Not relaxation, but a change from juridical input.
 - Once a week, time for lectio divina.
 - A short spiritual reflection before Tierce and None
 - This idea was suggested a few Chapters ago, but it turned out no one wanted to do it.
 - Perhaps an outside speaker, like Dom Mauro Lepori?
 - Perhaps this is something the delegates could do.
 - Other congregations: what do they do? Perhaps this is an opportunity to look at how they balance the spiritual and legislative: for example, the OFM's, the Bernardines.
 - The secretaries and translators are working all hours, after dinner, working into the night. What can we do for them, so they too can benefit spiritually?

SUMMARY by Fr Malachy: We recognize that the General Chapter is a juridical and legislative meeting, and that things have to be dealt with. But there's a strong opinion that we need to enhance the spiritual atmosphere of the Chapter, even if it lengthens the meeting. There is need for time for reflection, for lectio, where people can engage on a spiritual level. This is the synodal style, to allow the Spirit to guide us.

Links Between Communities & the General Chapter

Question 5: Links between communities and the General Chapter: how can communities be more involved in the General Chapter, and not just their superiors?

PRESENTATION 1: M. Jo

Can we look again at the role of the Delegate of the Region to the General Chapter, they used to write daily reports and send them to the communities. These were valued and gave an insight into the workings of the Chapter.

We are aware that in the past there were problems but can guidelines given to delegates about what information can be shared. Perhaps we can look at a definition of what is confidential. Threats of war, persecution or political consequences require everyone to be careful, so guidelines on what can be shared would be helpful.

Can some talks, conferences be recorded / live streamed and sent to communities, papers made available separate to the minutes of the General Chapter.

Opening and closing Mass to be recorded.

A General Chapter prayer to be said by the whole Order

Can monks and nuns have direct access to send questions to General Chapter?

Years ago before each Chapter we used to have more work to do in the community and to discuss documents

Daily 5-minute online summary of the day's activities e.g. like a TV News item

PRESENTATION 2: Dom Joel

It could help if the communities received more information about the main topics that will be discussed during the General Chapter – both in advance, and if possible, also some kind of update during the Chapter itself about what is going on.

A daring idea: A synodal process in the Order in which the communities would be led to reflect on the spiritual challenges in the life of the Order, and how to concretize them in the life of the communities and of the Order. Perhaps some issues that have been treated in the General Chapter could be submitted afterward to the communities, to get their advice before taking decisions at the following Chapter.

PRESENTATION 3: Dom Joseph

- We are already doing this through elected delegates of houses and regions to the General Chapter. Could the role of the regional delegate to the chapter be more clearly defined?
- We need relevant themes coming from the chapter for us to work on and discuss for the next 3 years, e.g. work, lectio, prayer, etc.
- Could some parts of the chapter be live streamed to the communities, e.g. the opening Mass, the Abbot General's conferences, other speakers, the closing Mass, etc.
- We need to also consider a shift to more pastoral approach at the chapter rather than matters of law, and how to communicate the pastoral aspect of the chapter to the communities, while of course respecting confidentiality.

PRESENTATION 4: Sr Mairead

Constitution 77: “It belongs to the General Chapter to ensure that the members of the Order have the possibility of unimpeded recourse to the various instances of appeal as needed: that is to the Father Immediate, the Abbot General, the General Chapter or the Holy See.”

Current Situation

- At present any member of the Community can submit their desires, concerns or suggestions to the General Chapter through the Abbess, through the Regional Meeting or Regional Delegate, or directly, through the Abbot General.
- They are free to make their concerns known to the Father Immediate at any time if they are experiencing situations or issues of grave concern in Community.
- Every two years the Community has access to the Father Immediate during the Regular Visitation.
- Monks & nuns can consult with him on matters affecting the welfare of the Community and can offer their opinions and concerns and ask for pastoral advice.
- The report of the Visitation is sent to the Abbot General following the Visitation.
- The Abbot General shares these reports with the members of his Council and matters of concern can be proposed as a topic for the Community and/or Regional Meetings.

How the General Chapter Works

- The preparatory work for the General Chapter begins in each local Community.
- Suggested topics and ideas are put on the agenda of the Regional Meeting and if voted positively, are passed on to the Central Commission.
- It is the Central Commission that formulates the agenda of the General Chapter.
- The Regional Meeting is responsible for appointing a delegate to represent the nuns and monks of the Region at the General Chapter. This delegate is a non-superior.

What can Glencairn offer by way of input, to become more involved in the General Chapter?

- The Abbot General, through his circular letters, documents, conferences etc. has given us a vision for the future. He has made suggestions regarding topics to be discussed e.g. on how to live and rediscover our charism and how to revitalise our Order.
- Our Community dialogues help us reflect on our lives and our dreams for the future of our Community and of the Order and to prepare for the General Chapter.
- At present Glencairn is actively involved through the participation of our English secretary, Japanese interpreter and Council member.

How can we become more involved?

- In the past, Sr Hanne Maria was our delegate & wrote a daily blog which increased our unity. The last Chapter stressed confidentiality, could a balance be found? Blog for communities only, live-links to streaming for some aula sessions?
- The last General Chapter was isolating because our delegate did not keep us informed. We need to find a way of knowing what is going on and be united with the General Chapter.
- After the Chapter, reading House Reports has helped us stay informed.
- Should the delegate visit the communities of the Region prior to the General Chapter (as Sr Lily did 1991)?
- The delegate should make the views of their own Region known.

POINTS FROM THE DISCUSSION

- *Before the Chapter.*
 - Superiors of communities could prepare for General Chapter with the communities
- *Livestreaming or Recording.* Many responded enthusiastically to this idea, including the delegates present, as having a huge potential for connecting the communities with the General Chapter. Among the events which communities might benefit from being able to see, the following were mentioned:
 - Masses, especially the opening Mass of the Chapter
 - Lecture, talks, spiritual reflections, especially the Abbot General's address
 - "Any significant moment"
- *Regional Delegates*
 - What is the scope of the delegates at present? Could it be expanded?
 - Could we be specific about how the delegates are underused?
 - If there were to be spiritual reflections during the Chapter, maybe these could be done by the delegates.
- *Delegates' blogs.* There seems to be a desire to reinstate them. Comments:
 - Some communities printed them out for all to read.
 - Everyone appreciated them, it gave all of us a sense of connection.
 - Not having them was a definite loss to the communities at home.

- As a delegate, I found this a difficult exercise because of confidentiality. We were not allowed to share much. What few things we did were much appreciated: a few drawings, for example.
- *Temporary professed.*
 - Since the time of formation is so long now, it would be natural to involve the young monks/nuns more, before solemn profession. They might have responsibilities as translators or secretaries. They may come with IT skills.
 - Many in formation now are older, more mature.
 - Participation in the General Chapter is a privilege: not everyone has that access. The fact that formation takes a couple of years longer seems not the correct argument – when there are professed people who haven't had that privilege.
- *The Synodal Process*
 - We need to have a serious reflection on the Order and synodality: what it means for us, how it informs our way of listening to community, colors our work. Synodality begins at the local level, then regional, then global. This is necessary for true Cistercian communio.
 - Dom Mauro Lepori's paper on synodality according to the Rule at the 2022 Chapter would be a good basis to begin a discussion.
- *House Reports*
 - Possible supplements or substitutions for the House Report:
 - A questionnaire distributed to all the communities on a particular theme such as the novitiate, or the future of the Order.
 - Questions to orient the house report, for the communities to have a deeper reflection, to think more broadly.
 - One difficulty: the strict limit on the length of the house reports. Often questions have been provided, but there is not enough space to explain matters.
 - Could each commission receive more information on the communities being discussed: for example, the Visitation Card?
 - Process for producing house reports: some examples:
 - Sometimes not very synodal. In some communities, the superior does the whole report and the community is not much involved.
 - A great process: starting in small groups, then a whole community discussion, then small groups again, then a written draft is produced.
 - The community picks two to write the report; the superior is hardly involved
 - An outside facilitator helps produce the report, giving the community a degree of freedom, to speak to someone coming from outside.
- *After the Chapter*
 - Superiors can give feedback after the General Chapter.

SUMMARY by *Fr Malachy*: The majority of communities felt that the loss of the daily blog by delegates broke a connection that had been developed over the course of several chapters. There is appreciation for informal news coming from General Chapter on a daily basis. For some, maybe most, there is a need for more clarification regarding the balance between respecting confidentiality of the General Chapter and being able to share with the communities. It is Important that within the area of confidentiality there be some guidelines, especially on what can be shared, for example about communities suffering persecution. The use of technology, particularly livestreaming (and recording, for those in different time zones), of certain aspects of General Chapter, would make a huge connection with the communities – the opening & closing Masses, & the Abbot General’s conferences, would be appreciated.

Mothers Immediate

PRESENTATION: M. Brigitte

(See also ocso.org\ Reserved Area\ Working Documents 2025\ Mothers Immediate Working Paper)

PART 1 – THE MOTHER IMMEDIATE EXPERIENCE

M. BRIGITTE’S EXPERIENCE

Our Region has three female superiors acting as Mothers Immediate:

1. M. Marie, for Mellifont/Roscrea/Mt Melleray
2. M. Jo, for Bolton
3. Myself, for Bethlehem.

I would like to recount my experience so far with being a Mother Immediate.

At the General Chapter 2022 Part 2 there was a special commission looking at communities without a Father Immediate, to find a way for them to have one. Three days before the end of the Chapter my name appeared on a list of potential Fathers Immediate. But the last morning the list was again read and I was no longer on the list.

In early December I received a letter from the Abbot General asking me if I would be “pastoral assistant” of Bethlehem, to help with their future. I consulted my council, who agreed, and wrote back to accept.

Around Christmas another letter arrived from the generalate, stating “by this letter I appoint you” Father Immediate of Bethlehem, including the right and obligation of making the Regular Visitation. In between the two letters, Bethlehem had received something from the generalate asking if they were willing to have me. After some prayer and consultation with my community I accepted.

So at this point we had moved past “pastoral assistant” to “Father Immediate.” I went to Bethlehem in February, in June, and in November more specifically to discuss the question of a new superior. In January I made the Regular Visitation with Dom Joseph of Mt St Bernard as assistant, and I appointed Fr Aelred as superior ad nutum.

Meanwhile Dom Bruno, the new superior ad nutum of Acey, had four daughter houses, and asked to be relieved of two of them. After consulting me, Dom Bruno wrote “I delegate M. Brigitte as Father Immediate of Rivet until the next General Chapter.” I will make the Regular Visitation in September.

So I am appointed to Bethlehem, but delegated to Rivet. In both cases, this is until the next General Chapter, at which point all the parties concerned will be consulted, and the Chapter would vote.

M. JO'S EXPERIENCE

Dom Michael of Bolton approached me during the General Chapter and asked if I was willing. He told me I would have a specific remit: to support Dom Michael in a pastoral way, and to set up a Commission for Future for Bolton. I consulted my community, and they said yes. I will be making the Regular Visitation in September or a little sooner.

M. MARIE'S EXPERIENCE

The meeting in Maynooth about the Irish houses included a consultation about the question of Father/Mother Immediate. The Abbot General appointed me as Father Immediate (it said in the letter) until the General Chapter of 2025. I received a hard copy of my letter of appointment from Dom Anastasius.

TEXT From the Working Paper on Mothers Immediate

5.2 Permanent "Mothers Immediate" The Order must decide if it wants to have the possibility of permanent Mothers Immediate, i.e. if communities of nuns can accept the "paternity" of daughter houses (see Section 2 above). If so: how should this be phased in?

One possible way is that:

- For future foundations: the abbess of the founding house becomes the "Mother Immediate" when the community becomes autonomous, so that the nuns will have the same filiation structure as the monks; and

- that existing foundations of nuns (which are not yet autonomous) be allowed to choose at the moment of autonomy whether they want to have the abbess of the founding house as their "Mother Immediate", or whether they wish to continue with the abbot who has been foreseen as Father Immediate; and

- that for communities which need to change filiation, any community (nuns or monks) could ask any other community of the Order (nuns or monks) to accept the "paternity".

POINTS FROM THE DISCUSSION

- *The name "Father/Mother Immediate" – should this be changed? Suggestions:*

- “Pastoral Assistant” is less juridic, but non-gender specific. It would highlight the role of being the assistant pastorally to a superior and community, and would separate it from filiation.
 - This could be heard as not having juridic authority: it is too weak: in fact, the person does have the authority.
- “Superior Immediate” widens the scope. All those eligible would have the possibility of exercising juridic, charismatic and pastoral care: an abbot, abbess, titular prioress or prior, etc.
 - “Superior” seems less benevolent than “Mother” or “Father.” A “Father Immediate” is a benevolent authority.
- “Immediate” by itself – this keeps traditional terminology, but is succinct and non gender-specific.
 - Other Orders use the adjective “Provincial” – this would be parallel.
- “Father Immediate” and “Mother Immediate”
 - Why complicate the terminology?
 - In some cultures, it’s not just the terminology, but the objection to a woman having authority over you, if you are a man.
 - Some congregations are moving away from language about “superiors” and using instead secular terms like “leaders.” But we have a religious language – including “abbots” and “abbesses” – which conveys something specific to ourselves, that reflects our patrimony.”
- *Filiation*
 - The monks and nuns have always been different in their experience of filiation and its relation to having a Father Immediate. For the monks, in principle the founder is the Father Immediate. But it is not clear whether a community of nuns is a daughter of the founding house, or of the Father Immediate.
 - If we separate the ministry of Father Immediate (or whatever it is called), from the lineage of the community (its filiation), then filiation ceases to be juridic and becomes charismatic.
 - The idea of filiation, of daughter houses all linked together and the whole Order as linked through filiation is something important and unique to our Order. This relationship is strengthened by the Visitation and other forms of support.
- *“Paternity”*
 - If we have both “Mothers” and “Fathers” Immediate, would we speak of “maternity” as well as “paternity”?
- *Permanent Mothers Immediate.* There was a strong consensus that the Working Paper presents good possibilities which should be tried out, but that it is too soon to change our legislation.
 - We need to allow the practice to evolve, or the legislation would need revision again very soon.
 - This would represent a major juridical shift in the life and customs of the Order.

- It's not entirely clear whether the proposal for foundations of nuns would be that they have a choice of Father or Mother Immediate, or if they now would automatically have their (nuns') founding house as Mother Immediate; it seems to be the latter. If we do not yet change the legislation, they would continue to have a choice. Not everyone may be ready for a Mother Immediate, and this should be respected.
- The third possibility, for communities which no longer have a Father Immediate, might be accepted already.
- We would like to allow the possibility of Mothers Immediate and evaluate it in 2028.
- Meanwhile, it would be good at the chapter of 2025 to hear the experience of those who are now Mothers Immediate, and of the communities who now have a Mother Immediate.
- *Evolution to date*
 - At the end of the 2022 Chapter there were five Mothers Immediate. Since then, another eight communities have been given a Mother Immediate:
 - M. Dominique (Soleilmont), two: Laval, and Nazareth
 - M. Isabel (Val d'Igny): Bonneval
 - M. Rebecca (Mississippi): New Melleray
 - M. Brigitte (Tautra): Rivet
 - M. Marie (Glencairn), three: Mt Melleray, Mellifont, Roscrea
 - So there are eight houses of monks, and five of nuns, with Mothers Immediate. The Isles Region has a large proportion of both Mothers Immediate and communities with a Mother Immediate: there are three Mothers Immediate, responsible for six houses.

SUMMARY by the Secretary: The proposals of the Law Commission are in line with aligning the governing authority of the monks and nuns in the Order and recognizing the present realities of fragile communities. At the same time, there is recognition that, for the monks at least, the historic relationship between filiation (a community's lineage) and pastoral care (Father Immediate/Visitation) is being weakened. There was general support for the new directions, with the caveat that some years of experience are needed before any changes would be made to our legislation. Meanwhile, it would be important that the developing structures be reviewed at the General Chapter.

Affiliation

The session began with reading aloud the Working Paper “Affiliation.” See:

Appendix 6: the entire working the paper

Appendix 7: the corresponding section of *Cor Orans*

Appendix 8: relevant votes (72 and 73) of the General Chapter 2022

PRESENTATION: Dom Joel

This proposal is an example of a positive effect of *Cor Orans*. The goal is that a community which is fragile have a chance maybe to go through a difficult period, and to recover or close. So it is a quite flexible solution.

There are many points in which the proposed “affiliation” is similar to the status of a foundation. There are aspects in which there is autonomy; the novitiate is in the “mother house” but the stages of formation are for the affiliated house.

POINTS FROM THE DISCUSSION

- *Practical Questions and Facts*
 - Affiliation is not a part of our Statute on Fragile Communities but another option put forward by *Cor Orans*.
 - At the 2022 General Chapter, Affiliation was accepted in principle (votes 72 & 73 (see Appendix 8). But it is *ad experimentum*, and so far no community is experimenting.
 - It seems that Engelszell considered the possibility, but decided against it.
 - *Cor Orans* was originally for nuns. The affiliation is presumed to be between communities of the same sex. Or are we thinking it might not be?
 - It is a practical question, if novices are to be formed in the affiliating house.
 - A community may have a Commission for the Future before reaching the stage of having a Monastic Commissary.
 - There are at present 11 communities who now have a Monastic Commissary as provided in the Statute on Fragile Communities: ten houses of monks (Westmalle, Snowmass, Oseira, Oelenberg, Myrendal, Roscrea, Mt Melleray, Mellifont, Las Escalonias, Latroun) and one of nuns (Assomption).
 - Difference between a Monastic Commissary and Affiliation: they are both offering assistance when a community reaches a certain stage of fragility. But whereas the Commissary is a single person, with Affiliation it’s a whole community which helps. In either case, the autonomy of the community is suspended.
 - An “Annex House” is a possibility only when a community has already been closed. Under a Monastic Commissary and under Affiliation, the community may move in the direction either of revival or of closure.

- *Positive Aspects*
 - The possibility of Affiliation gives a fragile community another chance. Sometimes in history some communities almost closed, then something happened, and they began again.
 - On the other hand, perhaps it takes much energy for no results; it is also a burden for a community to take care of another this way.
 - It looks for a positive solution, rather than assuming closure is the only option.
 - It offers a new type of ongoing assistance and discernment for fragile communities.
- *Juridic Aspects*
 - There are different ways to help a fragile community. Affiliation may be a possible way, but the ways need to be brought together in a document, so those different ways can be explored.
 - Question: would this option go in our Statute on Fragile Communities? Or perhaps in the Constitutions?
 - Perhaps when a community reaches a certain stage, they would have both options: a Monastic Commissary, or Affiliation.

Decision: It was decided that there would be no vote, but that M. Brigitte would bring to the Central Commission meeting the sense of the Region on the question.

The Abbot General's Council

DOM ANASTASIUS presented much of the material, interspersed with questions and some discussion.

Our Legislation

- As Statute 84.1.A says, the Council of the Abbot General is made up of five members. Four are nominated by the Regions, and elected by the General Chapter, two at each Chapter. A fifth member is chosen by the Abbot General and the other four. Councillors must be at least 40 years old, and solemnly professed at least 10 years.
- Upper age limit: in Part I of the 2022 Chapter there was some discussion of possibly setting an upper age limit, but no vote was taken.
- Number of terms. There was also discussion on this point in 2022, but no vote. So, councillors may be re-elected.

Present Membership on the Council

- Elected in 2022 for six years:
 - Dom Marco Antonio (Jacona, Latin America); speaks Spanish, but also understands English and French.
 - M Eleanor (Glencairn, Europe); speaks English and French.
- Elected in 2017 for six years (mandate ends at 2025 Chapter):
 - Dom Anastasius (Lantao, Asia); speaks English
 - M Rachel (l'Etoile, Africa); speaks French. She was appointed by the Abbot General in 2018, replacing M Regina. It was decided in the 2022 General Chapter that M. Rachel would finish M. Regina's mandate.
- Appointed in 2022 for three years (mandate ends at 2025 Chapter):
 - Dom Emmanuel (Val Notre Dame, North America; but originally from France); speaks French and some English and Spanish. He is now also appointed by the Abbot General as the Order's Bursar.

Some qualities required of councillors

- The Constitutions mention:
 - competence in language [must be able to speak one of the three official languages]
 - openness to different cultures.
- Geographic regions are generally considered.
- The capacity for collaboration, team work

Duties of the councillors

- Residence in the generalate in Rome.
- Participation in council meetings.

- The meetings can be canonical matters, where the Abbot General needs the consent of his council, for example to grant an indult.
- Visitation. The Abbot General can always decide to make a visitation to any community in the Order; he can also delegate someone else to make a visitation, and this person can be councillor.
- Commissions for the Future. The Abbot General's councillors can be considered for membership in these commissions.

Other points

- A councillor need not have been a superior.
- There was a request at the 2022 Chapter to maintain a gender balance on the Council, and at present there is: two nun councillors and three monk councillors (and of course, the Abbot General).
- Each councillor has two weeks a year to visit one's own country, and a one-week retreat at a location they choose.
- Minutes of the Council meetings are done by one of the councillors.
- The present council has been gradually building up a good working relationship.
- Meetings are conducted in Italian, but on occasion, if necessary, a councillor will use one of the official languages in which they are fluent, and someone else translates.
- There was a vote at the 2022 General Chapter that the Abbot General and his council give a report to the General Chapter about the functioning of the council: "The General Chapter ask the new Abbot-General and his council to make proposals, for the General Chapter of 2025, on the structure and functioning of the council of the Abbot General." Since a new Abbot General must travel a great deal initially to come to know the houses of the Order, there has not yet been time to prepare such a report.

The Procurator General

- The Procurator is the liaison between the Order and the Holy See. This includes submitting documents, cases, requests for dispensation, exclaustation, extraordinary administration. Most of the time the Procurator is the one to draw up decrees for indults for the Abbot General, and to gather documents to present to one of the dicasteries.
- The Procurator is elected from among the five members of the Abbot General's council. Once the appointed member is chosen (completing the council membership), the General Chapter elects the Procurator General.
- As far as we know, the Procurator General must be a priest, given our status as a clerical Order. But perhaps this will change, or has changed.

Other posts to fill at the General Chapter of 2025

- A new Law Commission was elected at the 2022 Chapter, and we have not been asked to make any nominations.
- The other (financial) commissions were also recently elected.

- At the end of the General Chapter, the members of the Coordinating Commission for the next Chapter are elected – five persons.
- The Central (or “General”) Secretary for Formation

SUMMARY by Fr Malachy: This is a topic we’ll have to keep in prayer as we journey toward the General Chapter. The councillors have a key role in the Order; there are not many who can make the sacrifices needed. We thank Dom Anastasius for his service!

Decision: we think it would be a good idea to re-elect Dom Anastasius and M. Rachel to the Abbot General’s council. It is also suggested that two terms are sufficient, although there is recognition that sometimes the needs of the Order might require more.

General Secretary of Formation

The Abbot General has suggested that, due to the importance of this work, and because so much depends on the time given to the brother or sister, that the person reside at the Generalate. This proposal will be discussed in the Central Commission, which also appoints the Secretary for Formation.

NAMES PROPOSED:

Sr Pamela Clinton, Wrentham. Held post in past, but did not have adequate time to give it. Presently Secretary of Formation for US Region, highly commended at recent regional meetings. Good skills in technology and organization. Languages? likely only English.

Br ? from Miraflores, a secretary at the last General Chapter

Fr David Lavich of Spencer, former member of the Abbot General's Council; takes care of Japanese. Has some Italian; fluent in Japanese.

Fr Samuel Chua of Tarrawarra, Regional Secretary for Oriens. Malaysian, good at IT. But of the official languages maybe only speaks English.

Sr Tamar Vertommen of Klaarland: speaks fluent Dutch, French, English, perhaps Italian or Spanish; delegate at the 2017 Chapter, organized meeting of the delegates. Very smart, may have Masters in Theology, maybe also classics. She's in her 40's, quite young.

Sr Paula Tellez Gonzalez of Armenteira, Spanish delegate to 2017 Chapter, spoke English well.

Monk of Novo Mundo, very skilled in languages; presently at Genesee, possibly not available.

Dom Richard Purcell of Mt Melleray. "The perfect person." Has the energy, the IT, the languages. Brings people around, completes projects.

There was some suggestion that, given internet translation resources, perhaps already having multiple languages is not as critical, "if the person really has a drive for formation and IT."

Regional Secretary of Formation

Question 7. On the function and role of the Secretary for Formation in the Regions. How do you see his/her service? New wishes?

PRESENTATION 1: Sr Renata.

The *Schola cisterciensis* is being produced by Fr Lawrence of Gethsemani and Sr Grace of Mississippi. So far, there are series on:

- a. David Bell on Rance
- b. Marsha Dutton on Aelred
- c. Michael Casey – old tapes from 1980's on Bernard

PRESENTATION 2: Fr John, Mt Melleray

The mandate is given from the region. Courses might also include psychology; last year, there were also courses on formation.

The regional secretary is someone: i) to assist & give guidance to people working in initial and ongoing formation. ii) to promote common formation projects for the region.

PRESENTATION 3: Br Luca

It's obviously very good what Sarah is doing. I'd like to expand her role in a different way. To be realistic, it would be more work for the regional secretary, but I think the importance of helping those in initial formation almost demands it. With fewer in formation, there is a smaller pool of formators and formators themselves are getting older, there is a greater generation gap – how to break it? Could the secretary play a more personal role, become an extra layer of support, a listening ear. The obstacles to this proposal rear up: time and cost. One practical solution is the high-tech one.

POINTS OF DISCUSSION

- *Pastoral Assistance*
 - Sr Sarah has been helpful to those in initial formation in the region. Her listening role and observations have been valued.
 - The extended initial formation period required by Cor Orans has posed new challenges for formators, in particular for junior directors who now have a longer five-year accompaniment period with their junior professed members.

How can we offer sustained, effective accompaniment in this prolonged formation period?

- There was support for the proposal of expanding the role of for the regional secretary to include supporting and assisting formators in the region.
- Since those in initial formation are decreasing in number, it might help if they came together more often, for example a month-long regional formation programme together in one of the houses of the region with Sr Sarah acting as assistant novice director.
- If the secretary's workload is increased, there might be need for a second person to assist her. Joint secretaries could benefit from consulting each other and sharing the more time-consuming workload. A monk was proposed as a joint secretary or in an assisting role.
- *Psychology*
 - It would be important to also offer psychological input to our monks and nuns at both initial and ongoing formation level in a more holistic formation approach. People are coming to us later in life, with deeper hurts, more complex journeys.
 - We need psychological assessments for our candidates, including those from other culture, and would benefit from having contacts with professional psychologists in different parts of the world who can assess our international candidates.
- *Courses for those in formation*
 - Differences in approaches to formation in the regions of the order were commented on: e.g. the US region offer a 4-year cycle for their junior professed monks and nuns, running two weeks every year.
 - The remit of the regional secretary has developed in recent years. During covid, Sr Sarah's role expanded from organizing annual regional junior courses to include organizing online formation courses for all in ongoing formation in the region. She has been open to ideas raised in the region regarding new initiatives/ approaches.
 - As well as inviting more seasoned, professional speakers, there are very capable speakers in the region of the Isles who could teach regional formation courses. Sr Nuala's course on the vows was much appreciated at Tautra.
 - Smaller communities face the challenge of lack of personnel and financial resources to free and to fund their members to attend formation courses. One solution would be to make a video recording of the upcoming formation course with Michael Casey for those who cannot be spared to attend.
 - Recordings of formation courses will also be useful for future generations.
 - Other formation resources outside the OCSO were mentioned:
 - The Nordic Contemplative Association may be open to having one or two of our members attend their meetings, and have expressed interest in joining our formation courses.
 - There is a Monastic Formators Programme based in Rome and Assisi run by the English Benedictine Congregation.

- There is an excellent O. Cist. programme running for a month a year for three years, covering scripture, theology, monastic vows etc. As it is quite intellectual those who attend need the aptitude for it.
 - It might be useful to develop a curriculum and a database of topics to be covered, resources etc.
 - We need to nurture future teachers in our communities.
 - We might also take into account niche areas that monks and nuns of the region specialize in.
- *Finances*
 - There was a proposal to create a regional formation fund, to have funds already available when needed, rather than funding on an ad hoc basis.
 - The fund could provide for formation courses offered by the region annually.
 - Perhaps all the monasteries of the region might contribute, regardless of whether they have personnel attending the courses.

SUMMARY by Fr Malachy: Everyone is extremely happy with the work Sr Sarah is doing, very appreciative. We recognize the huge workload that service carries and are very grateful. Speaking to the novice & postulant here, they greatly appreciated their attendance at the course. The role of the secretary has expanded, including ongoing formation. We'll need to speak to Sarah about possibility of a second person; a database of topic to be covered during formation period; and looking for people in the region who can do talks on topics. And perhaps we should have a fund to finance presentations going forward.

Regional Matters

Meeting with the Regional Secretary of Formation

Sr Sarah Branigan, Regional Secretary of Formation for the Isles, attended this session.

PRESENTATION: Sr Sarah – SEE APPENDIX 9

Further comments by Sr Sarah:

We have booked Fr Michael Casey to present this year's Junior Course in Our Lady of Hyning Monastery, U.K.; however, his costs will be very high coming from Australia and there are a small number of monks and nuns in initial formation in our region - ten in total. The challenge to raise funds to cover costs this year has necessitated opening the course to other contemplative orders and to solemnly professed members of communities of our region who wish to come. The Benedictine community of monks at Pluscarden in Scotland have also expressed an interest in joining our future formation initiatives and are sending their two junior professed monks to this year's Junior Course; they also offered their monastery guesthouse as a possible future venue for formation gatherings.

POINTS OF DISCUSSION

- To support the work of formation as a priority, it was agreed to open a regional formation fund to promote formation for all those in both initial and ongoing formation in the Region of the Isles.
- A recording of Michael Casey's presentation at Hyning in July would be very valuable for the benefit of those who cannot attend in person. Sr Sarah was given a quote of €5,000 by a professional videographer to make the video which would include recording and editing the week-long course. It was suggested that perhaps Fr Lawrence Morey (Gethsemani), a highly skilled videographer, could be approached to travel to Hyning to make the video recording. Sr Sarah agreed to follow up this suggestion.
- There was a discussion about the readiness of postulants and first year novices to attend the annual Junior Course. There was a general consensus to send all those in initial formation to the Junior Course including Postulants, Novices, Junior Professed and recently Solemnly Professed monks and nuns. The evaluation of the suitability and readiness of those at the early stages of initial formation will be left to the discretion of their superior and formator. Another factor to consider is that the topic may be unsuitable for a Postulant or Novice, depending on their needs and level of knowledge.
- It was agreed to change the name of the *Junior Course* to reflect its inclusion of monks and nuns at all stages of initial formation. The new title of the annual course taking place in the Isles region will be the *Initial Formation Course*.

- Should there be an additional meeting for Junior-Professed monks and nuns every year? They could gather at one of the houses in the region and avail themselves of input perhaps from the superior or formator or other members of that house? As there are only four Junior Professed monks and nuns in the Region of the Isles (one is already enrolled in the O. Cist. programme in Rome) perhaps we could consider approaching the U.S. Region about the possibility of their joining their annual formation course dedicated to Junior-Professed?
- It was agreed that in addition to organizing the annual Initial Formation Course that the Formation Secretary would also organize an online formation course for monks and nuns of the region in ongoing formation and an additional meeting for formators to be held every two years. There was a discussion about payment: a fee would be charged per participant to go into the regional fund. If the presenter was a monk or nun of our region they could accept or decline payment as they chose. The money, if declined, could then fund future formation initiatives. A suggestion was made to alternate local and international presenters in order to bring down travel costs.
- Joint/Assistant Formation secretary proposal: given the expanding role of the Formation Secretary, the question was raised as to whether a joint secretary was needed. Sr Sarah said she found that the present arrangement when organizing the Initial Formation Course of working in partnership with the Contact Brother or Sister of the community hosting the course was working very well and there was not really a need for a third person to be involved in preparations for the Initial Formation Course from an organizational perspective. However, having a monk organize the additional proposed online formation course and to be present at the Initial Formation Course as a joint secretary would be helpful and would enhance the function of the Formation Secretary. One superior suggested that having an assistant when needed might be sufficient.
- Sr Sarah thanked all the communities who have hosted formation courses that she has organized for their remarkably generous hospitality and spirit of fraternal welcome and friendship.
- She agreed to continue as Formation Secretary for another term and was willing to implement new initiatives beginning in 2025.

Regional Newsletter

PRESENTATION: Dom Jan (the editor)

First of all, I would like to thank all who have contributed to the Newsletter. Especially in the first place the sisters of Glencairn who took care of the printing and mailing all the Newsletters for the first nine years. I would like to thank all who have written articles, news items, poetry and other interesting things to read. I thank all the photographers and other artists who helped to make the Newsletters beautiful. Thank you all for your support and contributions.

The Newsletter in the present format started in April 2013. 33 Newsletters were produced during these eleven years, three a year, in April, August and November/December. I have been the editor from the beginning. Usually I send a reminder a month in advance of the deadline to all superiors and those who already had contributed and/or are interested to receive a copy. Copy, articles, news, pictures, poetry etc. are sent digitally to me, I take care of the layout, had it proofread by Br Teilo, and sent the final version as pdf to Glencairn. The sisters printed it out and sent a copy out to all the monasteries of the region, the generalate and some other addressees. During the one before the last Pastoral Sharing, it was decided not to print the newsletter out any more but to send it digitally to all monks and nuns interested to receive it. One copy has to be printed out locally so that people without computer skills or internet access can read it. I send the Newsletter in two formats. One format, usually called booklet, is meant to be printed on A3 paper to form a booklet A4. The other format, called pages, is meant to be printed out on A4, preferably on both sides, and stapled together.

Some statistics:

- We produced 33 Newsletters of 4 to 16 pages A4. Most are 8 pages long. We have a total of 328 pages, which gives us an average of 9.9 pages.
- The bulk of the newsletter is provided by Caldey, Glencairn, Munkeby, Tautra and Whitland, who contributed in 20 or more newsletters.
- Hying and Nunraw contributed in 10 to 19 newsletters.
- The others have contributed in less than 10 newsletters. Mount Melleray only contributed once.

I receive only a little feedback after each issue, but the comments are always positive. As far as I remember I did refuse only two articles. One about Gregorian chant as the only way out for the crisis in the Order and one negative and very lengthy article about St Bernard and his relationship to Ireland and the history of St Malachy.

A few remarks for the future:

- I would like more monasteries to contribute. Don't tell me that nothing interesting is ever happening in your monastery that is worth sharing. Professions, ordinations, appointments and elections, even obituaries are interesting to all of us. Sometimes I find the information on the website of the Order, sometimes even as a passing remark in an article about something completely different.

- If possible appoint someone in the monastery to be responsible for collecting news, to have articles written and photos taken and sent.
- On a more practical level:
- I don't know if my collection of email addresses is correct and complete. If you don't receive the Newsletters or the reminders, please let me know. If more monks or nuns want to receive a digital copy, please let them send me an email, so I can add them to the list.
- It is easier and less work if you send word files or rtf rich text format files rather than pdf files.
- Put the name of the monastery in the file name.
- Send photos of high quality, 300 dpi, and with a clear file name: monastery, event etc... Take your group photos close enough. We don't need feet and bodies so much but we want to see the faces. Write appropriate captions, with the event, the names of people in the picture etc...
- As I don't have a proofreader as good as Br Teilo anymore, make sure that your text is without mistakes. Abbreviations like Sr, Fr, Br are without a dot because they end with the last letter of the word.
- Put the name of the author at the beginning or the end of the article.
- Any news is welcome. If you have an interesting article, please share it. Don't make articles too long, let's say 2-3 pages max. If you come across other interesting or beautiful things, pictures, cartoons, poetry etc... please share. Better to have a bit too much to choose from than too little to work with.
- I have a new masthead ready for the next newsletter. The reminder for the next newsletter has been sent a few minutes ago.
- I'm willing to remain the editor.

Additional Comment by Dom Jan: I don't consider the newsletter a good forum for discussion: only appears 3 times a year: too long in between issues. That doesn't mean you can't send things that are controversial. Sometimes I don't agree, but that's not my job.

POINTS FROM THE DISCUSSION

- How much time does the newsletter take for the editor? Answer: about 3 full days total.
- Not all the brothers or sisters check out with their superior before submitting material. Dom Jan apologized that sometimes he has not always checked out a questionable submission with the superior – generally for lack of time.
- It's an instrument to draw the Region together. There are a lot of interesting things going on which are not shared. E.g. the Irish houses having a common novitiate.

GENERAL THANKS AND APPRECIATION expressed. Dom Jan is willing to continue to the job, and all are very happy that he would continue. There is always great interest in the newsletter on the part of the communities.

Regional Yearbook

The Benedictine Yearbook formerly put out in the Isles has been discontinued, in part because of costs, and also the monk who had been doing it was unable to continue. (The Yearbook was for all the monasteries of Great Britain and Ireland, and their overseas foundations.)

Dom Joseph presented a request that the Cistercians of the Isles fill the lacuna for themselves (Trappists and Bernardines of the Isles), and he volunteered to gather the information for a Cistercian Yearbook, to be put out annually, hopefully with a picture of each sister or brother.

Dom Jan volunteered that if Dom Joseph gathered all the information, he would be willing to do the layout and sent it out as a pdf file. It could also include email addresses, depending on the policy of each house.

Regional Elections

Sr Sarah Branigan of Glencairn was re-elected as Regional Secretary of Formation. One vote cast for having Sr Sarah and Dom Richard Purcell share the job.

Sr Renata of Tautra was elected as Regional Delegate to the General Chapter of 2025.

Next Regional Meeting

There will be a Regional Pastoral Sharing at Portglenone (Bethlehem), around May 2025.

Autocritique

Many commented on the wholesome, transparent and friendly atmosphere. Being comfortable in one another's company made it possible to be very open and honest. All felt included, everyone participated.

For several, superiors as well as delegates, it was their first experience of a regional meeting, and they were struck by the level of mutual pastoral support and collaboration between the houses of the region.

It was remarked that the previous pastoral sharing left an impression of depression, but this time there is a feeling of new life and serenity. Something is changing in the right direction.

It was amazing how much ground was covered at a very peaceful pace, in a mere four days. Everyone is very grateful to Fr Malachy for the great amount of preparation and planning which made this possible, as well as to his peaceful yet competent leadership, and to M. Brigitte and M. Marie who assisted him in various ways.

All deeply appreciate the regular participation of the Bernardines in the region, and great appreciation was also expressed to Dom Anastasius for his judicious contributions and for sharing his considerable knowledge and experience of the larger picture of the Order. Special thanks were given to Sr Kathleen for coming all the way from the U.S. to be secretary.

The icing on the cake was the prayerful hospitality of the community of Mt St Joseph, and the dedication and beautiful service of the guest house staff, who proved again that "Irish hospitality is second to none." To pray with our brothers in this house of so much history was a privilege and a delight. The prayers of the region remain especially with the three houses now in the midst of a process requiring enormous courage, self-abandonment and trust.

It was suggested that a prayer be created for the region's use, to pray for every community and each sister and brother.

Appendices

Appendix 1. Finances of the Order

By Fr Malachy Thompson

The following are just some views in the documents circulated in relation to the restructuring of the Order's finances. It seems from the documents that the Order has made great progress in implementing good governance and ensuring that best practice is followed in all areas of finance. [See the Central Commission 2023 Online Meeting.]

AUDIT OF THE FINANCIAL AND ECONOMIC SITUATION OF COMMUNITIES

While it is a good that “the Regular Visitation begins with an audit of the financial and economic situation”, I do not think it is always necessary or practical for this to be carried out by the proposed “financial auditor”, who is appointed by the Canonical Visitor.

In Ireland, where Monasteries are subject to external audit, this proposed audit list is already covered by the external audit. To conduct this proposed audit at visitation time would probably require a suitably qualified finance professional to be engaged/employed. Hence it would not only be a duplication of an audit process, but would also incur duplicate expenditure to have a “financial auditor” employed on a separate audit.

Perhaps a more realistic approach would be to ensure Monasteries comply with local legal/audit requirements and also to these standards of good practice. If this audit list of requirements is covered by an external audit, the audited Financial Statements and any accompanying reports should be deemed sufficient. If this audit list of requirements is not covered by an external audit, questions should be asked about local audit standards, and reporting and auditing to accepted international standards could be introduced.

An external audit by a qualified finance professional designated by the order could be carried out maybe every third visitation.

The Economic Visitation Checklist is a very good document.

In relation to employees should it also note the length of service and if an employment contract is in place.

The Finance Council. As well of the frequency of meetings, recorded minutes of the meetings should be available.

THE RENEWAL OF THE STRUCTURES AND THE FUNCTIONING OF THE FINANCIAL ENTITIES OF THE ORDER

It is clear that the past situations are not working as efficiently as they could have for the Order and that in some areas international best financial practice were possibly not being

reached. A proposal has been made “Towards a future solution”, and this proposal is to be in effect ad experimentum until the General Chapter of 2028. I think that certain aspects of the proposal should possibly be addressed/clarified/adjusted at the outset. Some of the points I make may already be implemented but just not clear from the document. It would seem that 2028 is quite a long time from now for a “proposal” to be in place, ad experimentum. It would seem to be contrary to business best practice to set in place new structures for such a period of time before confirming the process is robust and fit for the purpose. It may be that there is a strategy in place to review the process periodically during this time.

These comments relate to the section in the full written document titled “Towards a Future Solution”, commencing on p.6.

- I would agree and be in favour that there should be one “Commission of Finances”, with proposed three subcommittees (Investments, Generalate/Order, and Mutual Solidarity).
- At present the Abbot General “appoints” members of the Commission, but if the new proposal requires election to these positions at a General Chapter, it would be imperative that advance searches for suitably qualified/experienced candidates should be sought well in advance. These are key roles and need to be filled with competent people.
- I do not feel that meeting once a year is sufficient. Might it be better if the Subcommittees met when necessary for their work, but the full Commission of Finances could possibly meet quarterly, to review the recent quarter results and ensure budgets/targets are being met. If not quarterly than half yearly might be appropriate.
- I do wonder if it is necessary for the Commission of Finances to be chaired by the Abbot General. This Commission exists to assist the Abbot General. While the Abbot General should definitely attend the main quarterly meetings, would it be more efficient for another person to be charged with independently overseeing the Commission, and then bringing reports and solutions to the Abbot General.
- While all subcommittees should have suitable members who could be lay people if required, would it be prudent that the Investments Subcommittee should include one or more external/lay investment specialists. It is possible that this area is managed by an Investment Firm, if so the specialist would not be required.
- “Bursar of the Order” is discussed, but “Bursar General” as a title might indicate a greater cohesion across the finance areas that is being sought. “Bursar of the Order” implies they only relate to the Order and not the other subcommittees.
- The Bursar General needs to be a very suitably chosen person for finance. The proposal states this could be a lay person. The Order is looking for long term stability in finance, hence it might be better if the role is filled by a member of the Order that is there permanently, rather than a lay role that could be vacated quickly (e.g. new job elsewhere, maternity leave, early retirement). Legally it is also not desirable for a lay

person to hold the title Bursar, as they can be implicated as an office holder in the event of any legal proceedings against the Order. Possibly the best solution may be to appoint a suitable Bursar General from the members of the Order, and employ a lay finance professional (accountant) to work with them as necessary. This maintains continuity of knowledge and service, and gets professional input from the qualified accountant.

- The proposal says the Bursar will have voting rights on subcommittees “except in the sub commission of Mutual Solidarity”. Is there a specific reason why?
- The final point on p.7 requires each sub commission to prepare annual financial statements and submit them to the Bursar to compile into a single financial statement. It might be a better practice to do this quarterly for presentation at quarterly meetings of the full Commission.
- Regarding the investment funds – It would be vital that these should be separately identifiable. It would seem appropriate that the Investments Subcommittee should be responsible for overseeing the main investments of the Order, and also the investments relating to Mutual Solidarity. Is it appropriate that the funds should be merged? If donations are made from Monasteries to be used for Mutual Solidarity, would they not be restricted funds with a specific purpose. Would it not be more appropriate that they should be separately identifiable in a distinct account/fund suitable for this use. Also, the more frequent short-term use of these funds would need a different risk profile to the longer-term investments held by the Order.
- Regarding the proposal details on p.9 to have an “annually fixed percentage” of 3% allocated to the Mutual Solidarity Subcommittee – should this be explored further? Investments do not always rise, and taking money in a year of losses may not be prudent. Also, taking a fixed percentage off general funds means the capital may not keep up with inflation. As Mutual Solidarity funds should be kept separate, they might not yield much real monetary value at 3% either. Would it possibly be an option to seek annual applications to the fund, decide how much money is required for suitable applicants, and ask for donations to meet this. Any surplus collected can be kept for future years, and any shortfall could then be debated within the Commission of Finances as a reason to take from the growth on the main investments. It would be best practice for an overall investment policy be created / in place to stipulate thresholds, permissions, types of acceptable investment products, overall risk tolerance, etc.
- The overall aim of the changes is to bring finance functions together in a transparent way following international best practice in all areas of finance. The steps taken by the Order will ensure this is the case going forward.

Appendix 2 Economic Visitation

– text from the Course for new superiors, Rome 2023, Dom Emmanuel – translation by DeepL

What do I need to prepare?

- List of Community Members. (Average age, Novices, Temporary Profess...
- List of employees, full-time, part-time. With their jobs and responsibilities.
- The Economic Council: Composition, frequency of meetings....
- Authorisation of expenses for the Abbot and the Cellarer....
- All documents proving the legal existence of the community and related companies or associations.
- Important contracts: Current purchases, rentals, etc.
- Annual financial statements (generally the last three years) for the community and other companies.
- List of investments made since the last visit.
- List of loans granted (for a first visit, it may be useful to present the contracts signed for these loans).
- List of loans taken out by the Abbey (present the contracts).
- Tax information, registration numbers, relevant documents).
- List of real estate owned by the community.
- List of all rental contracts.
- List of current legal proceedings or disputes.
- Are there any forms of corruption?
- List of credit and debit card holders and the monthly amount authorised for each. To whom does everyone report their expenses?
- List of financial investments.

Appendix 3. Towards a Renewal of Financial Entities

The renewal of the structures and the functioning of the financial entities of the
OCSO

GENERAL CHAPTER, 2022/2, VOTE 76

Vote 76: We ask the Abbot General and his Council, together with experts, to renew the structure and functioning of the financial entities of the Order (Commission of Aid, Commission of Finance, and the Generalate), in consultation with the members of these entities.

PLACET 142

NON PLACET 7

ABSTENTIO 2

CONTEXT OF VOTE 76

- Report on the Management of the Commission of Aid and the Finance Commission (D. Emmanuel and D. Marco Antonio - request of CC Citeaux 2019, vote 57)
- Report was studied at the GC 2022/2 by the commissions 5+8 (lack of time, no clear statement was given)
- Ad hoc commission of the GC 2022/2 to study the Order's Finances. (Elected members Dom Gerard of Genesee, M. Pascale of Arnhem and D. Malachy of Roscrea)
 - *Conclusion: "Unfortunately it was not possible for us to make an effective evaluation and control of these accounts."*

RECOMMENDATIONS OF AD HOC COMMISSION

1. Establish a complete review of the accounts of the Order by a professional
2. Reflect on the structure and organization of the different entities of the Order.
3. Standardize the different accounts to be able to consolidate them
4. Apply international and ecclesial standards.
5. Specify and formalize the responsibilities of each entity and each person involved in these entities.
6. Establish clear operating processes in each entity and between these entities.
7. Let the accounts be audited annually by an external professional body

HISTORY

Statute on Temporal Administration (Approved by the General Chapter 1999). From section V, "The Order":

33. The Order is a juridical person capable of acquiring, possessing, administering and alienating temporal goods (can 634 § 1; 1255; C.42). In the area of the temporal administration, the Abbot General is responsible for the ordinary administration of the Order and of the Generalate (cf. ST.82.2.A and C) and the General Chapter for its extraordinary administration.

- 33 b) The Abbot General appoints a monk of the Order to be responsible for the ordinary administration of the Order. He also appoints a finance commission to administer the capital of the Order. This commission will provide the General Chapter with its annual reports.
- 33 c) The ordinary administration of the Generalate is the responsibility of the bursar of the Generalate who also keeps account of the general expenses of the Order. He presents its annual report to the General Chapter. The administration of the Generalate follows the rules laid down for the other houses of the Order. The Abbot General and the permanent council determine the share which each monastery contributes to the expenses of the Generalate, bearing in mind the economic situation of the monastery (ST.84.1.G).
- 33 d) Following the prescriptions of the Charter of Charity (7,4) when some houses of the Order are in need, the communities with more resources "inflamed by the fire of charity, and according to their ability, from the goods which God has given them should help them. A commission will study requests for assistance. Such requests must be submitted with a file explaining how the funds will be used and indicating whether assistance has already been requested and/or received from another organisation or community. The commission also manages a mutual assistance fund, which is funded by a free annual contribution from each monastery. It will be respond to requests insofar as possible or refer them to other communities or organisations that may be able to offer assistance.

Conclusion: Over the years, decisions have been taken by the General Chapters and also some practices that are not reflected in this statute on temporal administration:

Generalate

- For the last 23 years, M. Daniele has acted as the one who managed the accounts of the generalate and the ordinary expenses of the Order.
- The bursar of the generalate played no role.
- The accounts of the generalate and the Order were not separated and in it there were some accounts for different communities of the Order.
- Beside the official accounts there was a shadow administration
- There were no internal statutes or procedures
- An annual report was given to the abbot general/general chapter

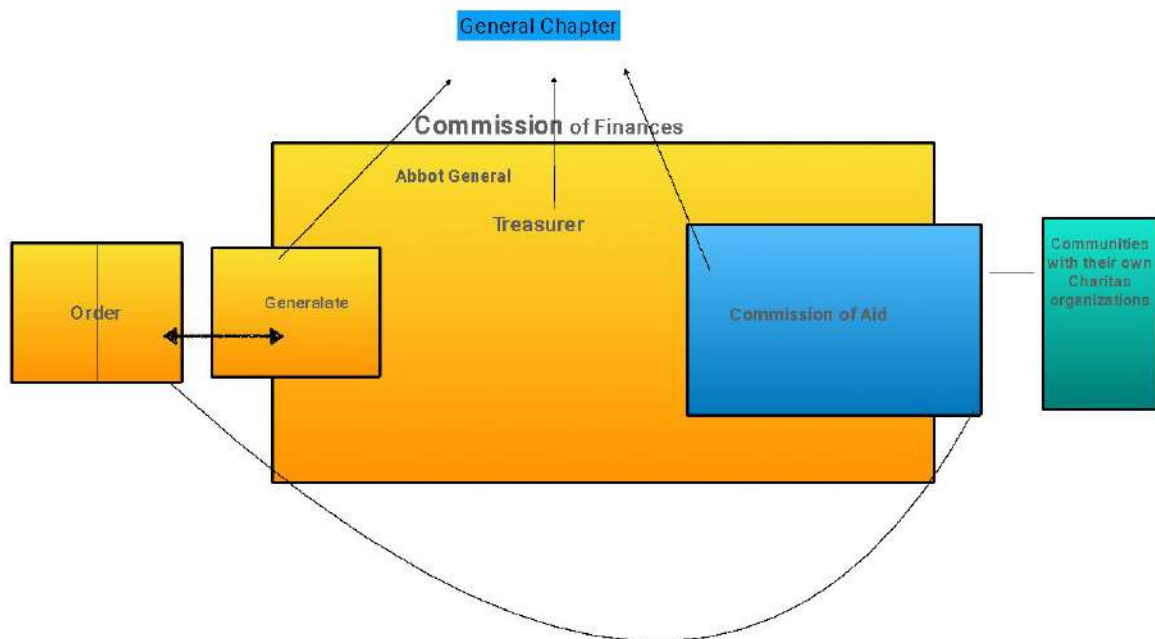
Commission of Finances

- After sale of Monte Castello (1982) a capital had been created
- Only the Abbot General could give loans from it to monasteries in need
- Central Commission of Gethsemani (1992) decided a commission of two competent members and a permanent councilor, together with the abbot general will manage the capital and take the responsibility for granting loans.
- The capital was managed by Tegelen (NL) and later Tilburg (NL)
- This decision was never approved by any general chapter.
- 1999 the Finance Commission of the Order (commission de finances) was canonically established by both general chapters.
- 2009 the commission set up a Statute and a treasury statute for the investments. The accounts are reviewed annually by an external auditor.

Commission of Aid

- General Chapter (Rome) 2002 added par. 33d to Statute on Temporal Administration.
- The idea of a solidarity fund created very different opinions. It was decided not to set up a fund but ‘a caisse d’entraide’ but in the translations of the GC it became ‘fund’ and ‘fundo’.
- The Chapter agreed on a commission to study, assess and follow up the requests of help (vote 23).
- The three members were appointed by the Abbot General and his council (vote 26).
- Communities were free to donate (vote 29).
- The fund would be managed by the commission itself (vote 28).
- The first commission of aid drafted a statute.
- General Chapter 2008 (Assisi) members were elected by the general chapter.
- The GC took the decision that the management of the Capital of the Order and the money entrusted to the commission of Aid was entrusted to the Commission of Finance.
- During GC 2014 and GC 2017 the financial needs of the houses were discussed (survey and working document) - no decisions.

PRESENT



FUTURE

Renewal and Restructuring

- All current structures will be dissolved.
- The Renewal and Restructuring requires adaptation of Constitutions, Statutes and the Statute for Temporal Administration
- This proposal will apply ad experimental until the General Chapter 2028 after which the General Chapter will have to approve, amend or reject it.

Members of the Commission of Finances (9 members):

Abbot General

Members of the Sub commission for Investments

Bursar of the Order - (Dom Emmanuel)

Member elected by GC (max. 6 years) - Dom Steele, Tarrawarra (2022-2028)

Member elected by GC (max. 6 years) - Dom Clement, Kokoubou (2022-2028)

Members of the Sub commission for the Generalate/Order

[Bursar of the Order - (Dom Emmanuel)]

Bursar of the Generalate - (Br. Javier, San Isidro)

Superior of the Generalate - (Dom Anastasius, Lantao)

Members of the Sub commission of Mutual Solidarity

[Bursar of the Order (Dom.Emmanuel)]

Member elected by GC (max. 6 years) - M. Pascale, Arnhem (2022-2028)

Member elected by GC (max. 6 years) - Dom Pedro, Miraflores (2022-2028)

Member elected by GC (max. 6 years) - M. Kathy, Redwoods (2022-2028)

Bursar of the Order

- Can be a monk or nun not a superior of the Order.
- A member of the Abbot General's Council (preference).
- With the consent of the General Chapter, may be a lay person.
- He/she is appointed by the Abbot General and gives regular account to him.
- He/she attends all the meetings of the Commission of Finance and the sub commissions and has active and passive voting right.
- He/she is responsible for the annual reports of the sub commissions and the consolidate annual report.
- He/she is responsible for the report to the General Chapter.
- He/she is responsible for the annual control of an external auditor.

Commission of Finances

- This is the advisory board of the Abbot General in his task of the ordinary administration of the assets of the Order.
- There is at least once a year a meeting under the presidency of the Abbot General.
- This meeting is prepared by the bursar of the Order in collaboration with the Abbot General.
- This Commission has the task to deal with the extraordinary administration of the Generalate.
- A proper Statute for this commission has to be set up.

Sub commission for Investments

- The task of this sub commission is to manage the capital of the Order.
- The investments have to be under the management of the bursar of the Order.
- A Statute has to be set up for this sub commission.

Sub commission for the Order and Generalate

- This sub commission has the duty to manage the ordinary administration of the Order and the Generalate.
- A Statute has to be set up for this sub commission.

Sub commission of Mutual Solidarity

- The name “Commission of Aid” has to be changed into “Commission of Mutual Solidarity,” because of the confusion with the commissions of help/future of the Statute on the accompaniment of Fragile Communities.
- The task of this sub commission is to collect, study, judge and follow up requests from the communities for financial assistance.
- The bursar of the Order is the only one who deals with the accounts of this sub commission. He/she will transfer the money to the communities, after the approval of the sub commission.
- A Statute has to be set up for this sub commission.
- Every year the Commission of Finance will decide to give a certain percentage (now: 3%) of the Capital of the Order to the sub commission of Mutual Solidarity.
- All donations to the sub commission of Mutual Solidarity above 25.000 euros/dollars will go directly to the Capital of the Order.

Appendix 4. International Character of the Order

By M. Jo, Whitland

Until now, the Order has been too much focused on the European zone. How can we find solutions for greater participation by communities and members outside Europe?

In our discussion there were a range of views expressed. We also asked what does it mean for the Order to be too focused on the European zone?

Some factors include

The History of the Order:

Founded in France

Early Documents and Cistercian Fathers

Globalisation of the Order as the result of European monasteries making foundations

Current Situation:

Languages of the Order are French, English & Spanish

General Chapter for several years has been held in Assisi

Generalate in Rome - The Pope and the Curial Offices are in Rome

The number of Regions in Europe is higher than other parts of the world.

Abbot General's Council 5 members comprises of two Europeans, one each from Asia, Africa and South America, other commissions could develop a more global balance

The Abbot General visits all continents, and the Council members visit Regional Meetings

Geography:

Europe Zone are we talking about Europe? Or are we talking about a Western versus Eastern or a Northern versus Southern issue?

Financial:

There are inequalities as some monasteries are financially dependent on European Monasteries.

For some Regions it is very expensive to travel to Regional meetings.

Political Stability:

There are global political and safety inequalities

Culture:

Western Cultures seen as having a more dominant style as issues are raised without social / small talk first.

The Roman Catholic Church is changing its culture.... synodality and women appointed to Vatican some posts.

Globalisation and technology bring awareness but not necessarily knowledge and understanding

Some cultures value diversity and greater equality than other cultures

Within the OCSO Regions there are many variations. Some Regions have many nationalities, languages, and cultures, while other Regions have a single or only a few nationalities, languages and cultures. This would impact on how the Region functions, and how they reflect the communities input to the Central Commission and from the Central Commission to the communities

We all live in a 'Post-Colonial' and 'Post Modern' society which brings its own benefits and problems. There is much hidden and increasing awareness of trauma and pain from colonialism.

Issues:

Have the monasteries in Europe more problems and therefore take up more time and effort in the Order? Do we know?

How to encourage greater participation by communities and members outside Europe?

Suggestions:

- 1) Communities write about features of their own particular cultural challenges in connection with monastic living, both positive and negative.
Share their special events and news.
Somehow we need to be able to get to know other communities' experiences and culture which are different.
Maybe the website could have a more informal news page / blog maybe a bit like during the time of Pandemic and lockdown.
Perhaps we need to hear about communities caught up in war, in persecution, affected by climate change, by refuges, by corruption of societal institutions, dictatorships and coups.
Also a sharing positive events and projects which can encourage others.
- 2) Open up discussions on how do different cultures interpret RB and the Cistercian Patrimony – are there difference?
- 3) Are foundational texts available for monks and nuns in their first language? The Experientia Programme covered a wider range of languages
- 4) Is there another language which could be a helpful addition to the languages of the Order?
Or a general review of languages required to aid communication
- 5) Should the Regional Structure be reviewed to help overcome isolation of communities, difficulties of expensive travel and visa problems?
- 6) Can more use be made of WhatsApp for example or other technologies?

- 7) What formation is required to help communities who find it difficult to be heard at the Regional level or at General Chapter?
- 8) The course for New Superiors was excellent, perhaps Superiors every 6 years could have a similar input as a way of keeping up to date, and to build understanding of other's experiences.

Appendix 5. The Spiritual Character of the General Chapter

By M. Marie, Glencairn

To avoid the General Chapter becoming too much of ‘law meeting’ or ‘voting machine’, how could superiors work more on the spiritual and pastoral level during the Chapter?

The Charter of Charity which was confirmed and approved in 1152 and which was the first Constitution of the Order says:

2. *Let all the abbots of these churches come to the New Monastery once a year on the day they decide among themselves, and there let them treat of*

- *the salvation of their own souls*
- *if something is to be emended or added to the observance of the Holy Rule or of the Order, let them so ordain it,*
- *and let them reestablish among themselves the good of peace and charity.*

3. *But if any abbot proves to have been*

- *less zealous for the Rule*
- *or too intent on things secular, or habitually prone to any vice,*
- *let him there be charitably proclaimed. Let the one proclaimed prostrate and fulfil the penance assigned him for the fault. But only abbots are to make this proclamation.*

4. *But should any church fall into intolerable poverty, let the abbot of that monastery take care to make this matter known before the whole chapter. Then let the abbots, one and all, enkindled by the most intense fire of charity, hasten to relieve the penury of that church, according to their resources, from the goods bestowed on them by God.*

Constitution 77 The General Chapter (updated 2022)

1. *At fixed times all the abbots and abbesses come together. They discuss there the salvation of their own souls and of those committed to them. They take measures regarding the observance of the Holy Rule and of the Order where there is something that needs to be corrected or added. They foster anew among themselves the benefit of peace and charity. They devote themselves to maintaining the patrimony of the Order and safeguarding and increasing its unity.*
2. *The supreme authority of the Order is exercised by all the superiors meeting as a General Chapter. The General Chapter is competent to legislate for the monks and nuns and to be responsible for the application of these laws. The ecclesiastical power of governance for the whole Order resides in the General Chapter in accordance with canon 596 §2 of the Code of Canon Law. It is exercised by the abbots with the cooperation of the abbesses in accordance with canon 129 §1 and 2. ST 77.2.A Any brother can submit desires or suggestions to the General Chapter. This is done through his abbot or Father Immediate, through the regional conference or the regional delegate, or even directly through the Abbot General. ST 77.2.B It belongs to the General Chapter to ensure that the members of the Order have the possibility of*

unimpeded recourse to the various instances of appeal as needed: that is to the Father Immediate, the Abbot General, the General Chapter or the Holy See.

ST 77.2.A Any sister can submit desires or suggestions to the General Chapter. This is done through her abbess, through the regional conference or the regional delegate, or even directly through the Abbot General.

ST 77.2.B It belongs to the General Chapter to ensure that the members of the Order have the possibility of unimpeded recourse to the various instances of appeal as needed: that is to the Father Immediate, the Abbot General, the General Chapter or the Holy See.

ST 77.2.C Ordinarily the General Chapter is convoked once every three years.

What are the Regions saying?

NED:

- We ask for the next GC to invite as few external guests as possible to lighten the program. YES 8 NO ABST. unanimous, vote accepted
- We always request a silent breakfast at the GC. YES 8 NO ABST.

REM:

- Difficult situations should have already been dealt with by those closest and most directly responsible: the Fathers Immediate and the members of the Region to which the community belongs, so that there is already a way ahead before the General Chapter.
- Perhaps we need to give more time to listening to the Spirit. What is he saying to the Churches?
- We come to the General Chapter, according to the Charter of Charity, in a spirit of conversion, with a readiness to receive criticism, correction and support for us and our communities. YES 14 NO 0 AST 0 unanimity - proposition accepted
- The Chapter leaders undertake to carefully prepare the Chapter and the documents entrusted to them. YES 14 NO 0 AST 0 unanimity - proposition accepted

What has helped to date:

- Having Sunday free
- Having Lauds and Vespers in common in the three languages
- Praying Tierce and None in the aula
- Having breakfast in silence
- Good preparation of the agenda by the coordinating commission

Reflection:

The GC is not a symposium. It is a legislative assembly and so does very well if it effectively makes decisions and defines laws. It is important not to see the spiritual element as something that is in contrast to this structural dimension of the Chapter. We come to the GC

well prepared, having read all the documents, having taken the time to reflect and pray with these documents and so our sharing comes out of a personal (communal) reflection.

To make the spiritual more explicit, it is certainly a good idea to have a few substantial conferences during the course of the chapter, from the Abbot General and others, but not too many. Homilies at Mass can be inspiring and helpful. There is time to prepare before coming to the GC.

The theatre is not an ideal place for the Eucharist but we have to accept the limitations as it would be far too costly to have the local church or the Basilica and they may not be available at a time that suits us.

A lot of work is done in preparation - the Booklets for Lauds and Vespers and the hymn sheets for Mass. This adds to the prayerfulness of the celebration.

Appendix 6. Working Paper on Affiliation

(Numbers in parentheses refer to Cor Orans; see Appendix 7)

1. (CO 54) Affiliation is a particular form of help that the General Chapter establishes in particular situations in favor of the community of a monastery *sui juris* which has only an asserted autonomy, but in reality, very precarious or, in fact, non-existent.
2. The request for this special form of help may be made at the free initiative of the community experiencing increasing fragility or by the Father Immediate of that house, or it may arise from the study of the situation of the community in the General Chapter itself. Only the General Chapter is competent to decide to establish it, after consultation with the fragile community and the community that would be available to provide this service. Between General Chapters, when the case is urgent, the Abbot General and his Council may establish it after the same consultations. Consultation of the communities concerned does not necessarily require a vote or a specific majority.
3. (CO 55) Affiliation is configured as a juridical support that must assess whether the inability to manage the life of the autonomous monastery in all its dimensions is only temporary or is irreversible, helping the community of the affiliated monastery to overcome difficulties or to put in place what is necessary to bring about the suppression of this monastery.
4. (CO 56) In these cases, it is up to the General Chapter to evaluate the opportunity of setting up a Commission for the Future formed by the superior of the affiliating monastery and at least two other persons designated by the General Chapter.
5. (CO 57) Through affiliation, the General Chapter suspends the status of autonomous monastery, rendering it *donec aliter provideatur* a house dependent on another autonomous monastery of the Order, according to what is established in the present Statute and any other provisions on the matter given by the General Chapter.
6. (CO 58) The Major Superior of the autonomous affiliating monastery is constituted Major Superior of the affiliated monastery.
7. (CO 59) The local Superior of the affiliated monastery is a nun/monk in solemn vows, appointed by the Major Superior of the autonomous monastery with the consent of his/her Council, having heard the nuns/monks of the community of the affiliated monastery. This local Superior is constituted the legal representative of the affiliated monastery and her/his function is limited to managing the ordinary daily life of the community according to the indications of the major superior.
8. (CO 60) The affiliated monastery can accept candidates, but the novitiate and initial formation must be performed in the affiliating monastery or in another monastery established by the General Chapter.
9. (CO 61) The candidates of the affiliated monastery are admitted to the novitiate, the novices to temporary profession, and the temporary professed to solemn profession by the

Major Superior of the affiliating monastery, having heard the community of the affiliated monastery and obtained the favourable vote of the conventual Chapter of the affiliating monastery.

10. (CO 62) Profession will be made for the affiliated monastery.

11. (CO 63) During the time of affiliation, the finances of the two monasteries are administered separately.

Appendix 7. Excerpt from *Cor Orans*

III. Affiliation

54. Affiliation is a particular form of help that the Holy See establishes in particular situations in favor of the community of a monastery *sui juris* which has only an asserted autonomy, but in reality, very precarious or, in fact, non-existent.

55. Affiliation is configured as a juridical support that must assess whether the inability to manage the life of the autonomous monastery in all its dimensions is only temporary or is irreversible, helping the community of the affiliated monastery to overcome difficulties or to put in place what is necessary to bring about the suppression of this monastery.

56. In these cases, it is up to the Holy See to evaluate the opportunity of setting up an ad hoc commission formed by the Ordinary, the Federation President, the Federal Assistant, and the Major Superior of the monastery [41].

57. Through affiliation, the Holy See suspends the *status* of autonomous monastery, rendering it *donec aliter* provideatur a house dependent on another autonomous monastery of the same Institute or of the Federation, according to what is established in the present Instruction and any other provisions on the matter given by the Holy See itself.

58. The Major Superior of the autonomous affiliating monastery or the Federal President is constituted Major Superior of the affiliated monastery.

59. The local Superior of the affiliated monastery is a nun of solemn vows, named *ad nutum* by the Major Superior of the autonomous monastery or by the Federal President [42], with the consent of the respective Council, having heard the nuns of the community of the affiliated monastery. Said local Superior is constituted legal representative of the affiliated monastery.

60. The affiliated monastery can accept candidates, but the novitiate and initial formation must be performed in the affiliating monastery or in another monastery established by the Federation.

61. The candidates of the affiliated monastery are admitted to the novitiate, the novices to temporary profession, and the temporary professed to solemn profession by the Major Superior of the affiliating monastery, having heard the community of the affiliated monastery and obtained the favorable vote of the conventual Chapter of the affiliating monastery or of the Federal President with the consent of her Council.

62. Profession will be emitted for the affiliated monastery.

63. During the time of affiliation, the finances of the two monasteries are administered distinctly.

64. The celebration of the conventual Chapter is suspended in the affiliated monastery, but the possibility of calling local Chapters remains unaffected.

Appendix 8. Votes on Affiliation from the General Chapter 2022

VOTE 72:

WE APPROVE THE USE AD EXPERIMENTUM OF “AFFILIATION” ACCORDING TO THE TEXT STUDIED AT THE GENERAL CHAPTER OF 2022 (GENERAL BOOKLET, P. 64-65) UNTIL THE GENERAL CHAPTER OF 2025.

PLACET 130 NON PLACET 13 ABSTENCIO 8 Proposition accepted

VOTE 73:

WE ASK FOR FURTHER STUDY OF “AFFILIATION” IN THE REGIONS BEFORE THE CENTRAL COMMISSION OF 2024.

PLACET 133 NON PLACET 10 ABSTENCIO 7 Proposition accepted

Appendix 9. Regional Formation Report

Recap:

I was elected as Formation Secretary in 2016. Since then I have met with you at the regional meeting of 2019 here at Roscrea. My mandate in 2016 was minimal: I was asked to organise an annual week-long regional junior course. This followed the region's decision in 2010 to 'focus the courses primarily on monastic values because juniors already receive sufficient theology through distance-learning courses.' At a subsequent meeting of the region it was additionally recommended that junior courses should also include input on psychological and human development, in recognition of the need to assist candidates entering monastic life today to receive a formation that is holistic and personalised.

Prompted by the Covid restrictions that prevented in-person junior courses in 2020 and 2021, an online meeting of superiors in 2021 discussed the need to explore the potential of online video conferencing to gather virtually for our formation meetings and I was asked to come up with some initiatives. We subsequently held a series of online formation conferences which were open to all monks and nuns in both initial and ongoing formation.

i) Looking Back: 2020 – 2024



Course on the OCSO Constitutions *January - June, October - December 2022*

Sister Eleanor Campion offered weekly classes online from January until in June, resuming in October 2022 on the subject of *the OCSO Constitutions* for monastics from the Region of the Isles, an invitation which was extended to the whole order.



Course on Monastic Vows *Region of the Isles, 25th - 27th November, 2021*

On 24th and 25th November, 2021, Sr Benedict Thiessen ocsso, from Arnhem, The Netherlands, gave six conferences over the course of two days entitled: "*Who is The One who Desires life and Longs to See Good days? The Vow of Conversatio Morum Suorum*".

These conferences explored how the vow of conversatio morum suorum can lead us towards transformation in Christ. Looking at our tradition, monastic texts, the modern experiential approach and reading in our own experience - more contemplating than reflecting – the course offered helpful signposts on our monastic pilgrimage towards our identity in Christ.

Online Course on Scripture *7th - 11th February, 2022*



From 7th to 11th February 2022, Sr Anne Elizabeth Sweet oco from Tautra Mariakloster, Norway, gave the second of our formation courses entitled: ***“First Corinthians: Words of Wisdom for our Monastic Communities Today”***.

The major concern of Paul’s First Letter to the Corinthians is the community life of this early Christian Church.

The Corinthians were richly blessed with many gifts, yet at the same time, they were a community torn apart by factions and

divisions. Paul’s wisdom regarding the challenges that faced them is timeless and universal, and both Benedict and our own Cistercian constitutions draw upon this letter. Examining Paul’s text, with the life of our own Cistercian communities in focus, Sr Anne Elizabeth brought both her academic qualifications in the field of scripture as well as the benefit of her monastic experience to produce insights from Paul’s wisdom that spoke to our own experience as Cistercians building community together in Christ.

Online Course on Early Monastic Spirituality 16th – 20th May, 2022



This course, presented by Fr Daniel Hombergen oco from Our Lady of Guadalupe Abbey, Oregon, USA, was entitled: ***“Emotional Disorder, Prayer and Healing in the Early Monastic Tradition”***.

Departing from the deeply rooted emotional disturbances called ‘Passions’ and ‘Evil Thoughts’, the early monks strived for healing through the ascetic struggle in order to ‘attain purity of heart and a continual mindfulness of God’ (cf.

Constitution 3:2). This practice finally developed into the Hesychast tradition, especially in the Eastern tradition, however the course focused on its early stage (4th to 7th centuries), with authors such as Evagrius, Cassian, the Apophthegmata, Diadochus, Dorotheus of Gaza, John Climacus and others.

Fr Daniel’s qualifications in Patrology and early monasticism and his experience teaching these subjects for several years in Sant’ Anselmo in Rome lent authority and breadth of knowledge to both his presentations and subsequent discussion in the group.

In addition to the learning and sharing of wisdom in these gatherings, we also enjoyed the opportunity to connect again, even if only online, with our Cistercian and Bernardine brothers and sisters in a spirit of prayer, learning and fraternal joy.

Junior Course at Roscrea 2nd – 8th October, 2022



Finally in 2022 we were able to organise a week-long seminar for our monks and nuns in initial formation in Mt St Joseph abbey, Roscrea from 2nd to 8th October. The seminar was entitled: *“Listening with the Ear of an Earth-Caring Heart: Reading the Gospel of St. John in the Context of the Ecological Crisis”* presented by Dr Margaret Daly Denton.

Formerly a nun of Glencairn, Margaret is an internationally published church composer and biblical scholar. She has taught bible and liturgy at various institutions in Ireland and has recently retired from teaching New Testament at Trinity College Dublin. Margaret has published several books including: *Psalm-Shaped Prayerfulness: A Guide to the Christian Reception of the Psalms* (Columba Press, 2010) and most recently

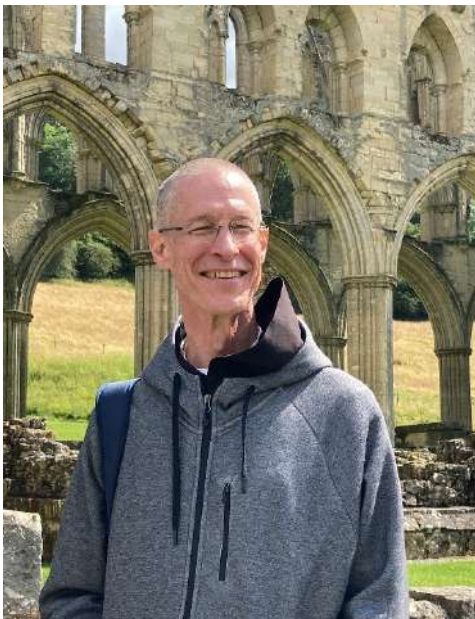
published *John: An Earth Bible Commentary: Supposing Him to Be the Gardener* (Bloomsbury, 2019)

On this course, the group worked together on reading the Scriptures from an earth conscious perspective, intentionally making the ecological crisis a context in which to listen to them. In the first few sessions, we learned from scholars who have been developing various approaches to the emerging discipline of ecological hermeneutics. We then focused in detail on doing an attentive, eco-hermeneutical reading of the Fourth Gospel.

Introduction to the New Testament Zoom Course March – September 2023

Margaret very kindly returned with a further offering for our region, extended to monks and nuns in initial formation throughout the order who wished to take part in a weekly two hour lecture series based on an undergraduate course Margaret taught at Trinity College Dublin before

her retirement. This 12-session online zoom course took place on Wednesday afternoons so that participants were able to follow this course from different countries and time zones. We are very grateful to Margaret for generously volunteering her time and expertise to our monks and nuns in initial formation.



Junior Course at Mount St Bernard Abbey 16 – 23 July 2023

Last year’s junior course focused on the writings of St Aelred. The presenter was Elias Dietz from Gethsemani Abbey. For this course, Dom Elias prepared especially a website for those participating to help them with their studies in preparation for the course containing recommended texts, notes, bibliography and maps.

A creative and practical solution for those who can access the internet to download the study materials.



A day trip to Rievaulx Abbey ruins complimented the excellent course content from Dom Elias.

Formators Meeting, Mellifont Abbey 28th February – 4th March 2023

A meeting of formators and vocation directors of the region facilitated by Gerard Perry and Rosario Power, clinical psychologists, took place in early 2023. Input to the group focused on the following areas: psychological assessment, human development (attachment styles and theory), formation relationships, formator supports (supervision), the applicant's journey and the stages and challenges encountered on the postulants and novice's developmental journey. The sharing and discussion that took place was considered enriching and supportive by the group and there was a general consensus that a regular formators meeting in our region was needed. Following the formators meeting, a digital file-sharing initiative was started, inviting the region to share formation resources. This initiative could be further developed to support our formation programmes.



Initial Formation Hike, *October 2023*

A hike in the vicinity of Mt Melleray Abbey took place for those in initial formation in the Irish houses of monks and nuns in October last year. The monk's hospitality was as always much appreciated!

ii) Looking Forward: 2024 - 2025

Junior Course at Hynning *4th - 12th July, 2024*

Michael Casey will be this year's presenter. The title of the course is 'Living the Experience of Vocation'. Course description: 'During these days we will reflect on the experience of vocation and its ongoing impact during the years that follow. In particular we will connect 'vocation' with 'mission' following the thought of Hans Urs von Balthasar. We will try to understand how monastic life opens up various possibilities for mission and helps to reduce what inhibits or obstructs it.' Due to Michael's high travel costs, we need to agree on how to cover all our costs for this course.

Junior Course at Tautra *October 2025*

Bishop Erik Varden will be next year's presenter on the topic of patrology.

iii) Evaluation

Junior Courses

In my opinion, the format we have followed has worked well. A week-long course, three hour-long presentations daily, a seasoned presenter - usually but not always monastic, topics covering monastic values and spirituality, occasionally psychology/self-development, space provided for personal reflection and a social dimension included in the timetable for participants to share and exchange their views and experience. The custom of allocating a day for an excursion offers a necessary balance of recreation and relaxation.

Online Courses

While the courses outlined above do not offer a substitute for in-person courses they are a worthy alternative to consider for bringing us together in a fraternal spirit in our region for the renewal and ongoing formation of our monastic life. The inter-generational exchange between elders and juniors in these courses was edifying to witness.

ii) Some suggestions

- Would junior professed monks and nuns would benefit from a meeting of their own annually, even if that means there are only two or three. Perhaps a monk/nun of the region could give them some input to support and affirm them on their journey.
- Biennial Formators Meeting proposed. Vocation Directors and formators need information, skills and support. Also, an 'oasis' time, together and apart.

iii) Needs/Clarifications

- In recent years we opened up the junior course to include novices and also postulants. There have been one or two dissenting voices on this, can we clarify again that this is the directive of the region to include novices and postulants. If so, Postulants at what stage?
- Finances: with fewer monks and nuns in initial formation, can we discuss having a regional formation fund to enable these courses to continue?
- Formation Secretary and Regional Meeting attendance: the Formation Secretary needs to meet with the regional superiors for a session at our regional meetings to seek clarity about what is being asked and an opportunity to dialogue about ideas/needs going forward.
- Joint Formation Secretary proposal: I think this would enhance the regional formation programme. It would not necessarily ease the workload however.
- Role of the Formation Secretary: the provision of a supportive role to those in formation and to formators has been suggested. I would be willing with clear guidelines & boundaries outlined that everybody is aware of and agrees with.