

HOPE

| 2 | general chapter 2025

M. Katharina (Nazareth)

Editorial: Pilgrims of hope



IN THE CONTEXT of the synod, Timothy Radcliffe asks what our hope consists of. He replies that our hope is Eucharistic. "In the darkest moment, Jesus makes the most hopeful gesture in the history of the world," saying, "Do this in remembrance of Me." What seemed like the end is not the end but a radically new beginning. Jesus, who gives himself completely to us, is the ground of our hope.

In this Newsletter, we zoom in on our 'Eucharistic hope'. We hear some echoes of what the Eucharist

means in our monastic life. The theme of the possible redistribution of regions is also highlighted. We also read reflections on the General Chapter from superiors with many experiences, from an interpreter and from someone from the secretariat. And of course a prayer, a cartoon, a joke.... Hopefully you will enjoy it. I hope so...

PS—and don't forget to dance !
cha-cha-ca !

D. Bernardus

Column: Living flame of hope



DURING CHRISTMAS EVE, I was privileged to be present at the opening of the Holy Door in St Peter's Basilica. It was a moving moment when Pope Francis, sitting from his wheelchair, opened the Holy Door. Even in our fragility, we are able to open doors! After the Pope, all kinds of representatives of the people of God entered St Peter's through the Holy Door while singing the hymn specially composed for this Jubilee Year, with the refrain: "**Like a flame my hope is burning, may my song arise to you: Source of life that has no ending, on life's path I trust in you.**" In that stream of members of the people of God, I saw the whole Order entering this jubilee year, as pilgrims of hope, on their way into the future. All

those brothers and sisters on their way to a General Chapter with the living flame of hope in their hands and hearts. A flame, sometimes weak, sometimes a blazing fire, but always a hope that makes us live.

That flow of people reminded me of a vision from the life of St. Bernard. Once while walking outside after the night office he prayed to God and during this prayer he was seized by "the desire for spiritual fruitfulness. Suddenly he remained standing and in the midst of his prayer, and with half-closed eyes he saw how from all sides of the nearby mountains there descended to the lower part of the valley such a crowd of people of all kinds of dress and national character, that the valley could not accommodate them all."

William of St Thierry adds, "What this meant is well known to all. By this vision the man of God was greatly comforted, and he exhorted his brethren, indeed pressed them to their hearts, yet never to despair of God's mercy." (*Vita Prima* 26)

Brothers and sisters, may this year of Jubilee, which is also the year of the General Chapter, increase our desire for spiritual fruit-

fulness. Let us never let abandon the hope. "***Like a flame my hope is burning, may my song arise to you: Source of life that has no ending, on life's path I trust in you.***"

PS—Perhaps it would be a good idea for us to make this jubilee song the song of the General Chapter!

Redistribution of the Regions

M. Isabelle (Val d'Igny)



ON 31 DECEMBER 2023 the Order had 153 monasteries divided into 11 Regions and one sub-region (CAN), grouping together from 9 to 19 houses, located at very different distances from one another. Their presence at all latitudes, in all languages, cultures, peoples and nations, is a richness for the Order but also presents communication challenges. Over the course of time, the division into Regions has already been reviewed several times, and the Central Commission of 2024 in Chile placed this question on the agenda of the General Chapter of 2025. More specifically, it will be a question of reviewing the composition of the Regions and their func-

tioning, as both are intimately linked.

Advantages and disadvantages of the current situation

For small Regions - in terms of size and geography - the small number of houses and their proximity make relations easier and often more frequent and more fraternal. Exchanges can be deeper and simpler, especially when everyone speaks the same language. Mutual aid and pastoral care are also facilitated. But the small number of houses can also hinder their smooth running and openness to other cultures.

In the larger regions, the communities are geographically distant from each other and culturally diverse. They need translations and interpretations, which makes exchanges more cumbersome and less spontaneous, and does not facilitate mutual understanding. What's more - even though they have the right to a second representative - in proportion to the number of monks and nuns in them, they are less represented than the smaller Regions on the Central Commission.

Ideas for a new distribution

To remedy this imbalance, several proposals have been put forward:

A| Create larger Regions in Europe and keep the current Regions as sub-Regions for pastoral meetings. And, inversely, for the large Regions such as RAFMA, ORIENS and REMILA, create sub-Regions made up of monasteries that are closer geographically and culturally.

B| Create Regions bringing together communities speaking the same language to ensure interculturality but with much less need for interpretation and translation.

C| Review the way in which the Regions operate by introducing new standards that involve the delegates to a greater extent: with delegates in all the Regions, whose presence and role would be the same in all the Regional Meetings. This would enable delegates to forge interregional and intercultural links, while facilitating the expression and reception of different perspectives throughout the Order.

Mother Regina of Abakaliki and Dom Steel of Tarrawarra are charged with drafting a working document on this subject, which will be dealt with at the General Chapter of 2025, by the extraordinary procedure, i.e. by all the commissions.

D. Jesus (Paraíso)



Regions: Listen and Respect

MY MONASTERY BELONGS to REMILA. Since 1998 I have attended all its meetings, and reflecting now on this long experience, two words resonate with me as a constant throughout: LISTENING and RESPECT.

REMILA is a geographically vast region. We consist of 15 houses, 7 male and 8 female, in mostly Spanish-speaking countries (except 2) and all united, roughly speaking, by a common cultural-religious background: the Catholicism that has shaped and given a

new, blended identity to these nations since the 16th century. Culturally this allows communication without too much interference; but much more significant is the existing atmosphere of LISTENING and RESPECT for what each community is and lives; in my opinion this is the evangelical fruit of an authentic and healthy living of our Cistercian charism. So one understands that this is what gives the Regions their full meaning as instances of reflection, mutual help and support.

M. Hortense (Clarté Dieu)



Witness: Eucharist

IT IS AROUND the Eucharist that a Christian community comes together. It is there that we receive the graces we need to live out our baptismal and religious commitments. After consecration, Christ is truly present in the consecrated Host. By receiving him, we become one body in him. So when I meet my sister in the cloister or elsewhere, it's Christ I'm meeting. When I'm going through something difficult, it's in the Eucharist that I find strength. It gives me the strength to persevere in my monastic consecration.

Br Arnaud (Munkeby)



The Eucharist is the Mystery that calls me to lay down what I am, what I live.

The Eucharist is the Mystery that teaches me to receive the One who gives himself.

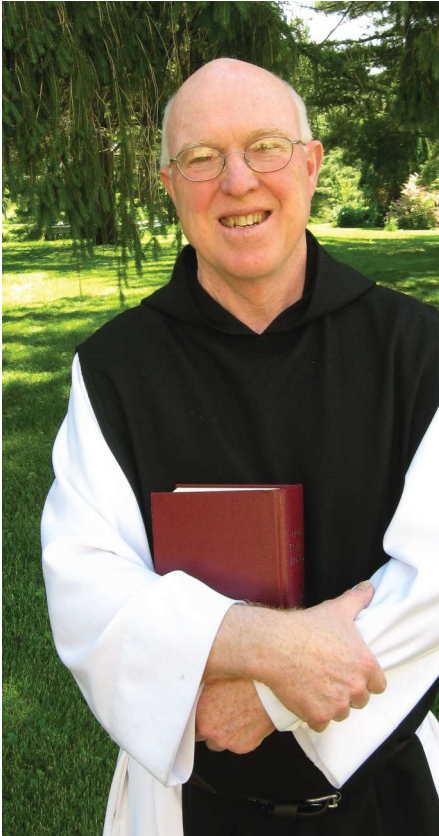
The Eucharist is the Mystery that invites me to join the brother who is near, the brother who is far.

“THE SYNOD ON synodality is a process that could very well be characterised as the awakening of the people of God by coming out of hibernation and becoming pilgrims of hope ... to a world that so desperately needs it.

Prof Dr Myriam Wijlens, member of the steering committee for the synodal process since 2021

D. Brendan (New Melleray)

The General Chapters, a story of evolution in inclusion



I HAVE BEEN to 14 General Chapters beginning with the 1984 chapter at Holyoak Massachusetts. At this Chapter Fr. Michael Casey read out each Constitution followed by discussions from the Capitulants. This completed our work on the new Constitutions mandated by Vatican II, as it were, since we have been improving and expanding them ever since! At the end of the 84' Chapter, we voted to include our Sisters at the next General Chapter in 1987. Some older Abbot's predicted dire consequences but just the opposite happened. We are now one Order of men and women which is still very rare in the Church.

Many votes have taken place since 1984 and many of these were for more inclusion: Las Huelgas, mixed coordinating committee, Abbesses assisting at Visitations of monk's communities, and now Father/Mother Immediate. A General Chapter is not all work and no play. I remember one time on the Feast Day of Dom Ambrose each region put on a show or skit of some kind. The US region did a square dance to the tune of "Little Brown Jug" accompanied on the accordion by a delegate of the Japanese houses, and a Spanish abbot, representing the Spanish region, sang an operatic love song to a Spanish Abbess sitting in a chair before him. Inclusion indeed!

M. Rosaria (Vitorchiano)

The General Chapter from 1990 to present



THE EXPERIENCE OF the General Chapter was initially for me the amazement of meeting brothers and sisters from all over the world: the variety of peoples and cultures in which the Cistercian charism was rooted appeared to me in all its beauty, as a gift and also as a call to be a living member of the Cistercian Christ. The great themes dealt with over the years and always resurgent were those of our identity and charism, of formation and, increasingly, the theme of precariousness, with the difficulty of addressing the decisive questions it raised: How to discern the root causes of precariousness? How to welcome and form in situations of fragility? And so on.

The Holy Spirit and fraternal charity guided us on a path of hope, and there was never a shortage of prophetic voices calling us to first renew our hearts and eyes, that is, our vision of the charism. Amid experiences of inculturation and interculturality, we have experienced the power of our Faith, which is capable of assimilating us to itself and purifying every culture, we have known the pitfalls of a possible flattening out on the world, and we have been continually reminded to start afresh from Christ, as the wellspring heart of our fraternal communion. Let us give thanks to God!

Sr Clothilde (Glencairn)



When you try interpretation, forget yourself

IN MY 50 years of Monastic life, I was given several privileged experiences to attend the General Chapters (5 times) and Consilium Generale/Central Commission (3 times) as English/Japanese interpreter. During these years OCSO has been greatly changed and is changing. Many foundations were made outside Europe/USA. 'Regions' were born and are firmly established as an inevitable part of our structure. OCSO is now a multicultural and multilingual institution. Accordingly, the needs of interpreters/translators are growing. Modern technology can help but that is not sufficient. For true

communication always needs the human touch.

When I was attending the workshop of simultaneous-interpretation, the instructor said: "When you try interpretation, forget yourself. 'Listen' to what he/she is saying, and just simply put what you hear into the other language."

Don't we hear similar advice in our monastic life?

I wish all the interpreters/translators, who will serve at the next GC 2025, will be blessed and rewarded for their work which is 'hidden and laborious'!

Sr Fiachra (Glencairn)



English Language Secretary at the GC

ON AGREEING TO act as secretary to a Regional meeting in 2018, I had no idea it would lead to participation at Central Commission meetings in Citeaux, Rome and Chile, not to mention both parts of the extraordinary General Chapter of 2022 in Assisi. So, for someone who, on entering the Order thought her global travels had been consigned to the past, I have much for which to thank the great God of Surprises!

Undertaking the role of Secretary at a General Chapter is a

daunting, exciting, exhausting, but very enriching experience. From doing so I have gained a far broader understanding of the global nature of our Order and how it functions. I have met many gifted, talented and dedicated people from all over the world, been present at the election of a new Abbot General and attained an appreciation of the practical importance and implications of our Constitutions and Statutes in our life of Prayer and Contemplation to which we are all committed.

“CLIMBING SINAI TAKES untold effort. You go straight up immediately just like a wall. But the effort was not felt by me, and the reason was that I saw my desire being fulfilled according to God's will.

EGERIA, from her pilgrim diary dated Sunday, 17 December 383.

“THE SOUL'S CRAVING is strong and its restlessness grievous to be redeemed and live with Christ. The craving in her is great and strong, and her existence is heavy and hard. Unspeakable is the pain the craving makes her endure. Yet she must live in hope, and hope makes her hunch and languish. Ah holy desire of the Minne (*Love*), how strong is thy strength in the loving soul.

Beatrice of Nazareth, From the 7th Way of Minne

D. Védaste (Mokoto)

Prayer



God our Father,
In this Holy Year of the Jubilee 2025,
our OCSO is preparing for the general assembly of our superiors
with the main theme
"the Cistercian charism in today's world under the sign of hope".
We pray to you for the smooth running of the preparations for this chapter.
We also entrust to you our Abbot General
and all our superiors who will be taking part.
May your Holy Spirit enlighten them,
so that their work at the next General Chapter
may bear fruit that will be pleasing to you,
for the good rooting of the Cistercian charism in today's world.
We ask this through Jesus Christ your son, our Lord.

Joke

A vicar's daughter had been out all night and came home at four in the morning. Her father looked at her sullenly and said :

- Good morning, child of the devil.

The girl respectfully replied :

- Good morning, father.



D. Jan (Caldey)