

HOPE

| 3 | general chapter 2025

M. Katharina (Nazareth)

Mater Immediata



THE GENERAL CHAPTER is just around the corner, and the theme of the so-called 'Matres Immediatae' will be discussed in detail. I feel blessed in two ways in this regard.

Since the last General Chapter, our 'father', Westmalle, was no longer able to take on the task of Pater Immediatus, and we turned to our foundation house Soleilmont, so that M. Dominique is now our Mater Immediata. A very beautiful experience!

I myself have the privilege of fulfilling this role for the community of Aiguebelle. I find it a wonderful task to extend pastoral care to brothers from another community, and it also strengthens

the sense of belonging to the Order among all my sisters here.

The mutual care of superiors for other communities is new to abbesses, but I have experienced it as a very powerful event over the past three years. I remain grateful to the brothers of Aiguebelle for their openness and hospitality, as well as to our own Mater Immediata, and I wish all superiors, brothers and sisters the same experience!

PS For the capitulants with green blood: don't forget to bring your own cup for the breaks. That way, you'll save at least fifty plastic cups!

D. Bernardus

The last lead weights weigh most heavily



THE DUTCH SAYING 'the last lead weights weigh most heavily' probably comes from trying to balance an old set of scales, where the last few weights were often the hardest to get in place. Now, too, with the General Chapter starting in three months' time, we are feeling those last few weights. There are still many details to be sorted out, but it is precisely those little things that bring the necessary balance.

The Poor Clares of the Convent of St. Clare have let us know that they would like to welcome us again to pray Vespers together.

Seemingly small moments like these are very important because they bring balance between work and prayer during the General Chapter.

I am writing this column shortly after a pilgrimage to the tomb of Blessed Marie-Joseph Casant, together with my then secretary, Fr Raphael. Standing at his grave, I entrusted the General Chapter to his intercession. Especially the final stages, which are now so difficult in order to organise everything completely and well. Would he ever have worried about a General Chapter? Probably not!

Marie-Joseph Cassant was a man who was great in small things, ordinary in the extraordinary, a true pilgrim of hope. As I stood at his grave, the words of his novice master came back to me: "Ayez confiance! Je vous aiderai à aimer Jésus"

(Have confidence! I will help you to love Jesus), came back to me. Those same words now ring out for us, on the eve of the General Chapter. May this chapter help us to love Jesus. That is my hope!

Br. Cassant (Rawaseneng)

Connected in the Cloud



THE INFLUENCE OF internet connection in human life today is so strong. A fresh example is the news of the death of Pope Francis. Catholics all over the world immediately mourned. Since then, all the faithful have united in directing their attention to St. Peter's Basilica.

For our Order, this phenomenon is in line with the results of the Central Commission meeting in Chile last year. The interconnection channel in the cloud will be used in this year's General Chapter to improve communication, both among the capitulants and communities of the Order. As I recall, this has started since the 2017 General Chapter before covid-19. At that time, many photos taken during the General Chapter were uploaded to a special website, so that they could be downloaded and

viewed in each community. That was the first time that I and my confreres in Rawaseneng could see for ourselves what the General Chapter was like.

In this upcoming General Chapter, we hope that what has been started can be further enhanced, including: The Opening and Closing Eucharists of the General Chapter will be broadcast live, and will also be recorded to be watched at another time. There is also the possibility of doing the same with other events.

For me personally, the existence of this cloud team brings hope to unite every member of our Order, making our communities, despite their own diverse backgrounds, feel more united and raise awareness as one Order of Cistercians of the Strict Observance, as Trappists, our one identity!

D. Raphael (Oita)

About Working Papers



HOW MUCH HAS the Order changed in the short span of the last 20 years? For example, the realization of single Chapter, the legislation of enclosure for monks and nuns: further, the hot topics for the next General Chapter, such as the possibilities of non-clerical superiors and of Mothers Immediate, are just a few of the many issues that have been dealt with at past General Chapters. Some themes have been addressed with at several General Chapters and discussed for more

than 20 years. Working papers have been prepared on the same agenda from different perspectives. We can read in each document about the problems faced at the time, the conflicts of our predecessors, and even their palpable feelings of anxiety. We tend to focus only on the results of the discussions, as reflected in the voting results, the Constitution, and the revised provisions of the Statutes. However, we cannot imagine how much debate, uncertainty, and struggle our predecessors went

through to get to that point. I believe that working papers serve as a record of these discussions. Their courage and perseverance in overcoming their concerns and challenges can be seen in those working papers of past General Chapters. Their fortitude shines through in the working papers, and I am deeply touched by it.

In preparation for the next General Chapter, many working papers have been drawn up. The purpose of these documents is to assist members who will participate in the 2025 General Chapter, as well as those who watch over at home, not present in Assisi. At the same time, they are also documents for our successor, to be read

ten, twenty, or even ninety years later. Our future generations will surely learn something from those documents of the 2025 General Chapter.

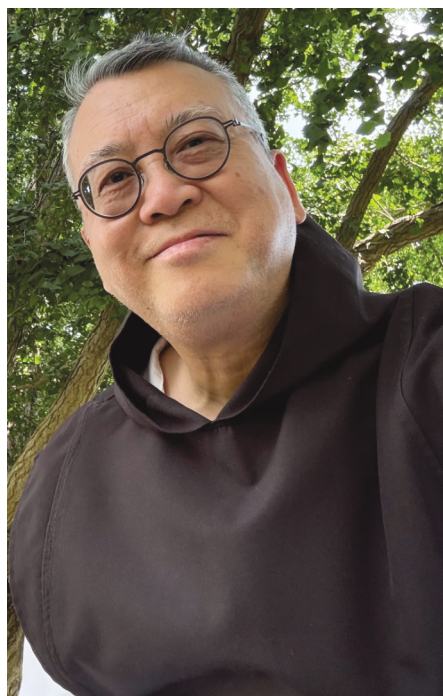
In the life of Cistercian, every moment is something new. The challenges we face now are constantly changing—from moment to moment. What I misunderstood when I entered monastic life was that this was a stable life that would continue until my death. It didn't take me long to realize that the Cistercian life is all about facing constant change and endless uncertainty. Without a clear understanding of the instabilities we face today, we cannot take on new challenges. Working papers help us to

clearly recognize our problems, concerns, and dilemmas. Despite the worries and tensions we feel, we learn that we are being guided by the Lord through surrendering ourselves to Him. The more precarious our situation becomes, the more we surrender ourselves and find hope beyond the precariousness.

There is a famous saying by St. Bernard of Clairvaux: "Concepts make things clear, but emotions enrich experience." Working papers make the challenges we face clear, and the experience of the General Chapter enriches us. And Working papers are, in themselves, a source of emotions.

D. Anastasius (Generalate)

Spiritual Dimension of the General Chapter



INSPIRED BY THE Holy Spirit, heard in the Regions, discerned in the Central Commission, and put into practice, is to call attention to the spiritual dimension in our General Chapter.

No doubt, the General Chapter is integrally legislative, pastoral, and spiritual. Surely what we intend to do is not something superficial, like wrapping the Plenary and Commissions sessions with a prayer ribbon at the beginning and the end, just as a formality and to feel nice. Rather, it is out of a

true common desire and sincere hope to place us all in a spiritual building (space) of prayerfulness, and thus mindfulness of the presence of God, the Gospel values, and the gifts of the Holy Spirit in the three-week-long General Chapter. It is a gentle yet ardent reminder of our collaboration with the Holy Spirit in our contemplative listening, our mutual support and services in the Order, re-establishing among ourselves the good of peace and charity (*Charter of Charity* 7:2).

D. Alberic (Schiermonnikoog)

Meeting of Regional Secretaries for Formation



ELEVEN REGIONAL SECRETARIES for formation from around the world gathered in Valserena in June 2025. Together we reread the formation plan of our order, as

proposed by the Central Commission in Chile last year. This formation plan, the Ratio Institutionis, is a document loved by many. It contains many striking and valuable

descriptions and guidelines. It is exciting to be working on such a comprehensive text with this group. The current text dates from 1990 and was a first and successful attempt to draw up such a text. In 2025, it is clear that we can undoubtedly retain much of the Ratio, but that we must also use this opportunity to do justice to today's reality. We hope that our proposals will be helpful to the upcoming General Chapters in reaching good decisions.

Br. Aelred (Kopua)

My hope for my community



MY HOPE FOR my community is, that we may have an ever deeper life of Faith, Hope, and Love in our relationship with God and with each other in Community as Pilgrims of Hope, along with our brothers and sisters here in Aotearoa-New Zealand.

I hope that all the Monks and Nuns of our Order may increasingly catch and live our Charism of Unceasing Prayer, as encouraged by our Abbot General in his recent letter to the Order and in that way become more dedicated disciples of the Gospel of Christ, for the good and welfare of God's people in our broken world.

How do I look forward to the General Chapter?

Br. Antonius (Lamanabi)

General Chapter: School of synodality and School of hope



FOR ME, THE September 2022 General Chapter is a School of Synodality. Although it was my first time, I felt accepted, involved, and encouraged to actively share, or ask questions. From this experience, I share the responsibility to think and do something for the good of the Order. Furthermore, the 2025 General Chapter will be a School of Hope, where I and the brothers actively walk together with the same hope. Let us return to Assisi with the joy of faith and sincerity of love. Whatever our joys and sorrows, there is always hope that never disappoints.

M. Mary Ann (Kunambetta)



Open to what the Holy Spirit is saying to us today

THE GENERAL CHAPTER is an experience in which I am rooted in the desire to live the Cistercian life centred on Christ. It is also an openness that invites us to creativity. In other words that resonate within me are: unity and pluralism. Hearing and seeing how the Cistercian charism is lived out in different communities and therefore in different cultures is an enrichment.

My hope is that listening, attentiveness, vigilance and inventiveness will become ever more active and living realities in our Order, so that we are constantly open to what the Holy Spirit is saying to us today for the good of all.

Br. David, Spencer (rector in Nasu)



My Experience of the General Chapters

and nuns of the Order. It is the General Chapter that has guided us in the renewal and adaptation called for, never doubting our identity as a contemplative monastic order. The frank and open sharings in the commissions, sometimes painful, with monks and nuns from every continent, has enabled us to understand one another and be able to reach out to those in need. Structures created by the General Chapter can guide a community in need of closure or joining in collaboration with another community. We have commissions of aid because we know the people and monasteries in need.

Regarding leadership in the Chapter, years ago my first impression was the persuasive interventions of certain experienced abbots. Gradually the nuns have gained more influence as they are becoming a majority in the Order.

Furthermore, the rising strength of the new monasteries from the new churches in Asia and Africa seem to indicate where the future lays.

The challenges that face us now need the strength of the Holy Spirit to guide us through some uncharted waters. We will depend on the grace of the Paschal mystery to accept inevitable closures and also unthought of new births. Are the venerable structures of Father Immediacy and autonomy being stretched to their limit? How can these be creatively adapted at the service of all of us?

Finally, history has shown us that any genuine renewal in monastic life comes as a gift of the Spirit. The necessity of changing structures can only bear fruit when accompanied by the interior conversion and renewal of persons.

PERHAPS THE COMING General Chapter will be my last one (77 years old!). I began as a "novice" interpreter for the Japanese at the General Chapter of 1996, and I have served since as a translator or as general councilor - a total of ten General Chapters! Three abbots general brought a varied focus.

The impression that remains is the strength of a General Chapter representing all the monks

M. Caterina (Macau)

Prayer for the General Chapter



Almighty God,
we humbly approach you,
seeking your guidance and blessings
for the upcoming General Chapter.
May your Holy Spirit inspire and guide all who will gather,
fostering a spirit of unity and love.
Grant wisdom and discernment
to discern your will for the future of our communities,
so that we may faithfully follow Christ
in every decision we make.
Bless all members of the chapter with strength,
health, and a deep faith
that will enable them to be effective witnesses of your love.
May this Chapter bring forth
new energies for the renewal of our monastic life
and the ongoing mission of sharing your grace
with the world.
We entrust the outcome of this chapter
to the intercession of Mary, Queen of Citeaux
and to your loving care,
trusting in your divine plan.
We ask this through Christ our Lord.
Amen.

Joke

At the end of Mass, the priest asks:

—'Who among you has forgiven your enemies?'

Everyone in the church raises their finger, except for one old man in the front row.

—'Why don't you forgive your enemies?' asks the priest.

—'Because I have no enemies,' replies the old man.

The priest can't believe his ears and asks how old he is.

—'I am 99 years and eleven months old.'

All the churchgoers applaud.

But the priest remains suspicious:

—'So old and no enemies?'

To which the old man smiles:

—'They're all dead.'

HOPE

Texts from some Regional Reports



ORIENS 2024
D. Francisco

The reality includes both the positive and the negative. Seen together, we can see where the signs of hope lie.

ORIENS 2024
M. Giovanna

THE FIRST POINT I want to speak about is on 'embracing vulnerability' –we tend to talk about vulnerability and fragility in terms of aging communities, but there is also vulnerability and fragility in younger communities. This is the law of life: if we don't accept to

die, we refuse to be born. The word 'embracing' struck me. If the community can embrace the vulnerability of each member without being scandalized, but as the presence of the Lord come among us with His wounds, then maybe there is hope for renewal in the community. The wounds of the other are also ours. It's difficult: we don't want to suffer, and we don't want

the suffering that comes from others. Yet it may be through this suffering that we are saved. We say, "This sister is difficult," or "This sister makes the community suffer so much." This problem of embracing our wounds is clearer in the younger ones, because they are full of wounds ... coming from their family, and from the wider society.

USA 2024



AS AN ORDER we are in a time of fragility and weakness that is consistent with the challenges being experienced in the Universal Church. The lack of vocations and new leadership that plagues us is understandable in the

context of what is happening in the Church. As we reflect on the history of the Order, we, likewise, are reminded that this is not the first time that we have faced the challenge of re-founding our charism. It is important to keep this in mind as

we engage in the process. The recent circular letter of Dom Bernardus on Pentecost inspires hope and urges us to cooperate with the Holy Spirit at work in our fragility. In living the Paschal Mystery, there is always hope in the Resurrection.



D. Jan (Caldey)

