

Meeting of the US Region 20-27 February 2019

SUMMARY REPORT



Our Lady of Mepkin Abbey
Moncks Corner, South Carolina



REGIONAL MEETING PARTICIPANTS

Mepkin Abbey

MONASTERY

Berryville
Crozet
Genesee
Gethsemani
Guadalupe
Holy Spirit
Mepkin
Mississippi
New Clairvaux
New Melleray
Redwoods
Santa Rita
Snowmass
Spencer
Wrentham

SUPERIOR

Fr Joseph Wittstock
M Kathy Ullrich
Fr Gerard D'Souza
Fr Elias Dietz
Fr Peter McCarthy
Fr Augustine Myslinski
Fr Joseph Tedesco
M Rebecca Stramoski
Fr Paul Mark Schwan
Fr Mark Scott
M Kathy De Vico
M Victoria Murray
Fr Charles Albanese
Fr Damian Carr
M Sofia Millican

DELEGATES

Sr Maria Gonzalo

Br Thomas Richards

Sr Myra Hill

Br Juan Diego Levado

Br Adam Zielonka
Sr Karen Myers

INVITED GUESTS

Fr Timothy Kelly, Generalate, Abbot General's Council
Dom Clément Charbonneau, Abbaye Notre-Dame de Mistassini
Dom Peter Verhalen, O Cist – Our Lady of Dallas Abbey
Br Cassian Russell, Holy Spirit Abbey – Regional Secretary of Formation
Sue Schuttinger, Regional Digital Communications Director

SECRETARIES

Sr Barbara Smickel, Crozet
Sr Anna O'Meara, Mississippi
Br Christopher Cheney, Vina

President of the Region: Fr Elias Dietz

Assistant Moderators: M Victoria Murray, Fr Gerard D'Souza

Vote formulation: M Kathy De Vico and Fr Mark Scott

Readers for the Minutes: Fr Joseph Wittstock and M Kathy Ullrich

Finances: Secretaries

27. We request a dispensation from the requirement of *Cor Orans* (#250-#289) regarding the minimum of nine years required for initial formation, from aspirancy through the juniorate.

YES 11 NO 1 ABSTAIN 3

28. We request that the Law Commission revise CST 13.3 of the nuns Constitutions (on leave of absence) to incorporate *Cor Orans* #176.

YES 14 NO 0 ABSTAIN 1

29. We request the Law Commission to revise CST 62 of the nuns on 'exclaustration' as defined in *Cor Orans* #177-#178.

YES 15 NO 0 ABSTAIN 0

V. Common Fund

30. We support the proposal of a Common Fund for the Order.

YES 3 NO 11 ABSTAIN 1

REGIONAL ISSUES

(Both Superiors and delegates voted on the following, 21 persons in all.)

I. Delegates

31. We wish to continue the practice of the communities sending delegates to the Regional Meeting.

YES 21 NO 0 ABSTAIN 0

32. If yes, the delegates would attend the Regional Meeting immediately before the General Chapter.

YES 12 NO 3 ABSTAIN 6

33. We wish to continue the practice of sending delegates to the General Chapter.

YES 18 NO 2 ABSTAIN 1

34. We wish to maintain the present practice of sending one monk delegate and one nun delegate to the General Chapter.

YES 7 NO 12 ABSTAIN 2

(If vote #34 is no, we will send one monk or one nun delegate to the General Chapter.)

35. We wish to maintain our Regional Statute 4.b as it is.

YES 2 NO 19 ABSTAIN 0

(Because of the result of this vote, our Regional Statute will be revised to incorporate the results of the following votes.)

36. Electors of the Regional delegate to the General Chapter are the Superiors and delegates present at the Regional Meeting with delegates (the meeting in the year of the General Chapter).

YES 16 NO 5 ABSTAIN 0

37. Those eligible to be elected delegate to the General Chapter are all the monks and nuns of the Region.

YES 1 NO 18 ABSTAIN 2

38. Those eligible to be elected delegate to the General Chapter are those delegates present at the Regional Meeting.

YES 21 NO 0 ABSTAIN 0

39. We desire the alternation of monk and nun delegates, Chapter to Chapter.

YES 1 NO 18 ABSTAIN 2

40. We desire the Region to provide delegates with guidelines and an orientation concerning their role at the Regional Meeting.

YES 15 NO 5 ABSTAIN 1

41. We desire that the delegates compose a one page report of the Regional Meeting for the communities of our Region.

YES 8 NO 12 ABSTAIN 1

42. We encourage all the communities to send delegates to the Regional Meeting.

YES 14 NO 3 ABSTAIN 4

III. Monastic Business Association (only Superiors voting – 15 total)

43. We ask the Monastic Business Association to investigate the possibility of a certification mark for products of our Region, and to present the results of their investigation at the next Regional Meeting.

YES 14 NO 0 ABSTAIN 1

IV. Cistercian Publications

44. We elect the three new Superiors in our Region to the Cistercian Publications Corporation:
Fr Joseph Tedesco of Mepkin, Fr Charles Albanese of Snowmass, M Sofia Millican of Wrentham.

YES 15 NO 0 ABSTAIN 0

INTRODUCTION

Since many members of the US Regional Conference come from areas of colder winter weather, all happily anticipated Mepkin's warm welcome – and we were not disappointed! After a day of rain and lower temperatures, the sun came out – and we could admire all the evidences of early spring on the Abbey's beautiful grounds. The rains also came – but the milder temperatures were much appreciated.

The brothers here have a well-deserved reputation for southern hospitality, and it was extended very graciously to the total of 26 persons in our group of superiors, delegates and invited guests gathered February 20-27 for our 2019 Regional Meeting. Fr Timothy Kelly, Procurator General, represented the Generalate, and Fr Clement of Mistassini came from the Canadian Region. Fr Peter Verhalen, O Cist, was with us from Our Lady of Dallas Abbey, and Br Cassian Russell was also present to give his Regional Secretary of Formation report. We were also joined for a day by Sue Schuttinger, our Regional Digital Communications Director who gave a thorough overview of her work with and for our Regional Website and various social media platforms.

At this meeting we welcomed three new superiors in our Region – M Sofia of Wrentham, Fr Joseph of Mepkin and Fr Charles of Snowmass. We also remembered in prayer three former superiors whom the Lord has called home during the past year – Fr Malachy of Holy Trinity, and Fr Thomas Keating and Fr Joseph Boyle of Snowmass.

Among the many topics treated were the document *Cor Orans*, the evaluation of the last General Chapter, and preparation for the election of the Abbot General at the next Chapter, as well as the work done since the last Chapter on CST 67.

Full Minutes of the meeting in English, and a summary version in English as well as the Summaries in French and Spanish will be posted on the Order's website. A copy of the Full Minutes will also be sent by email to the Generalate and to all the US monasteries.

The report which follows tells of the discussion and decisions during the meeting, but can only partially convey the spirit of mutual respect and openness and friendship which characterized our gathering – and made of this meeting a concrete expression of the Charter of Charity in our time.

* * * * *

Elections:

Regional President: Fr Gerard D'Souza

Coordinating Committee and Co-Moderators: Fr Paul Mark Schwan and M Kathy Ullrich

Regional Secretary of Formation: Sr Pamela Clinton of Wrentham

Regional Delegate to the General Chapter: Sr Myra Hill of Our Lady of the Mississippi

Substitute for the Regional Delegate: Br Juan Diego Levado of New Melleray

Regional Health Plan/Catastrophe Fund Administrator: Holy Spirit Abbey, Conyers

Cistercian Publications Board: President: Fr Elias Dietz; Treasurer: Fr Gerard D'Souza

The two other Cistercian members of this Board: Fr Brendan Freeman and Fr Lawrence Morey

Next Regional Meeting: June 3-10, 2020 at Our Lady of the Genesee Abbey

SUMMARY REPORT

Evaluation of the last General Chapter

Appreciation was expressed for the very pastoral character of the 2017 Chapter. We have put some recommendations for the 2020 Chapter in our Votes, especially continuing the theme of revitalization, revisiting our structures, asking how we can inject new life into the Order, valuing the past while creating something new. We would like the House Reports to report on the trajectory and major events in the life of each community since the last Chapter. We are concerned about the increasing burden of business requiring the attention of the Abbot General in between Chapters; we ask what might be done creatively to alleviate this?

Preparation for the election of the Abbot General at the 2020 Chapter

We studied the process of preparation for the last election in 2008 and are in favor of the use of a similar process in 2020. Prior to the Chapter, we recommend that every Region be asked to articulate the realities of its particular situation. It is within this context that the discernment of appropriate candidates for the office of Abbot General can be made. Our Votes specify in particular that we support the surfacing of the names of nominees by the mixed commissions at the Chapter, and some would appreciate the opportunity to ask questions of those proposed.

Cor Orans

It seems obvious to us that the Federation requirement should not apply to our nuns because we form one Order with our monks and have a single General Chapter for oversight, assistance, etc. But the exemption from this requirement needs to be the subject of a request to the Holy See – by the Abbot General and his Council acting in the name of the General Chapter.

On the matter of enclosure, *Cor Orans* provides various types of enclosure and requests all monasteries of nuns to choose the type of enclosure which best supports their charism. Monastic Cloister is one option. This corresponds best to the general practice and desire of most of the houses of nuns in our Order. If the General Chapter approves this, the US Region supports the revision of CST 29 accordingly.

Regarding the new requirements on foundations in *Cor Orans*, a possible way of proceeding would be to ask the Holy See to continue to use our Statute on Foundations as it is – since it is a Statute we have been constantly adapting to new situations and new means over the past 50 years.

The newly-defined required length of time before final profession occasioned much discussion. The document specifies a total of 9 years of formation before final vows. The impetus for this requirement seems to be the number of departures after final profession – and the recognition that in many cases persons from the world of today simply need more time to be formed to make a free, responsible final commitment. The number of candidates coming from broken families, and having betrayals, abuse situations, and a lack of a firm Christian foundation, all militate against the maturity and stability needed for perseverance in monastic life.

One other area to be noted was the provision in *Cor Orans* that a community loses the right of election when the Conventual Chapter is reduced to five solemnly-professed members or less.

Our discussion focused mainly on #287-#288 in *Cor Orans* concerning the duration of temporary profession. On the matter of a longer time now prescribed for formation, the reasons advanced are solid, but it was pointed out that we already have this option in our Constitutions.

CST 67 and new Statute on Accompanying of Fragile Communities

M Kathy of Redwoods attended the meetings of the Law Commission which had prepared this material and was able to provide valuable background. Our Order's attention to this spans many years, beginning with Dom Bernardo Olivera's conferences on the increasing fragility within the Order, and the subsequent attention given to this over many General Chapters. More recently, the documents *Vultum Dei Quaerere* and *Cor Orans* stress that juridical autonomy needs to be matched by autonomy of life.

It is helpful to recall the many initiatives already taken in our Order in response to this situation – mergers of communities that have already occurred and others being considered, downsizing in many monasteries, smaller buildings being utilized, lay employees taking on more responsibilities, etc. So there is awareness of the seriousness of the situation – which was certainly underlined by a total of six houses suppressed since the 2017 Chapter.

We examined in detail and with gratitude the excellent work done by the Law Commission, and we went through the proposed changes for CST 67 as well as the new *Statute on Accompanying Fragile Communities*. The final result of our discussion is reflected in the Votes we are proposing for the Central Commission Meeting in June.

A point often mentioned in our consideration of the new Statute is that of the Father Immediate retaining his authority – in particular we desire that he be the one to choose and appoint the Monastic Commissary rather than the General Chapter doing so. In this case the Commissary would report to the Fr Immediate rather than to the Chapter – a more effective arrangement. It is necessary that the Chapter decide on the suspension of autonomy for a community, but the Fr Immediate should then be the one to handle what follows from this.

Suppression Process and Related Issues

Related to the suppression process is the question of the new stability for the members of the suppressed community. Fr Paul Mark brought this to our attention. Our present Constitutions provide an automatic “right of return” to the motherhouse without any probation nor requiring any approval of the motherhouse community. It seems to us that this is unrealistic in our present circumstances, where a number of motherhouses have been suppressed or are in a condition where they could not accept additional members. Also, the present legal climate is such that it would be very imprudent to accept someone who may be virtually unknown. The important issue is to provide a living community for each monk or nun where they can live their monastic vocation and be assured of permanent care. Our concern about this is reflected in our Votes.

Delegates to Regional Meetings and General Chapters

We reviewed the matter of delegates – the historical background and present practice. The presence of delegates at the Regional Meetings has been a very positive experience, though many communities in our Region are finding it difficult to spare another person along with the Superior for a week's time.

We have asked ourselves about the presence of delegates at the General Chapters. There are some drawbacks to this.

- Given our present moment in history, there are difficult topics to discuss in the commissions at the Chapter (particular discussions on leadership, sexual abuse, fragile communities, etc). It can be a very negative experience for the delegates and not beneficial nor necessary.
- The presence of delegates in the commissions can inhibit some sensitive discussions.
- The number of persons at the Chapter is already very large, and it is very expensive.
- The ‘Delegates’ blog’ has been good – but on occasion it has been a source of untimely information.

Perhaps it is time to open a discussion about the presence of delegates at the General Chapters?

US Regional Matters

Regional Secretary of Formation

Br Cassian Russell had this position from 2013 up to the present, with much generosity in the areas of organizing Junior Seminars, collaboration with the Vocation Directors and other regional initiatives. His successor, Sr Pamela Clinton, will benefit greatly from all that is now in place in the area of formation in our region.

Carta Caritatis Colloquium at Our Lady of Dallas in July 2019

This program is the result of intense collaboration between our Order and the Cistercians in Dallas, for the 900th Anniversary of the Charter of Charity – seen not only as a celebration but also envisaged as a path into the future. Dom Eamon and Dom Mauro will both be present, as well as many members of both Orders and also invited scholars. The Colloquium will explore the historical origins and intentions of the *Carta Caritatis* as a means to understand how we can integrate this into the life of Cistercians of both Orders in meeting the challenges of the 21st century. Participation is open to any monks and nuns who are able to attend.