

REGIONAL MEETING 2019

Mount Saint Joseph Abbey 20-26 February



REPORT

PARTICIPANTS

Members

	SUPERIOR	DELEGATE
Whitland	M Christine Wood	Sr Jo Harrison
Mount Melleray	D Richard Purcell	Br John Dineen
Mount St Bernard	D Erik Varden <i>President</i>	Br Adam Rekan Suvit
Mount St Joseph, Roscrea	D Malachy Thompson	Fr Liam O'Connor
Caldey	D Daniel Van Santvoort <i>Vice President</i>	Fr Jan Rossey
St Mary's, Glencairn	M Marie Fahy	Sr Eleanor Champion
Mellifont	D Brendan Freeman	<i>No delegate</i>
Nunraw	D Mark Caira	Br Barry Dougan
Bethlehem	D Celsus Kelly	Br Vianney O'Donnell
Bolton	D Michael Ryan	<i>No delegate</i>
Tautra	M Brigitte Pinot	Sr Christina Van Opzeeland

Guests

Sr Elizabeth Mary Mann (Brownshill)
Fr Joël Regnard (Munkeby)
D Anastasius Li (Abbot General's Council)

Invited for one day

Sr Sarah Branigan (Glencairn) – Regional Secretary for Formation

Secretary

Sr Fiachra Nutty (Glencairn)

Sr Josephine Mary Miller (Hynning), unable to attend, presented her apologies, as did D Bernardus Peeters, invited as a guest from the Dutch Region, and Sr Jo Harrison (Whitland's delegate).

INTRODUCTION

Dom Erik, President of the Region formally opened the meeting on the morning of February 20th, 2019 with a warm welcome to all present and particular thanks to the community of Roscrea for hosting the event. A special welcome was also extended to Dom Anastasius Li, representing the Abbot General's Council. Apologies from Dom Bernardus of the Dutch Region, Sr. Jo of Whitland and Sr. Josephine Mary Miller of Hynning were recorded.

Everyone was reminded that the primary objective was to prepare for the Central Commission meeting due to take place later this year and the General Chapter of 2020. The statute of the Region of the Isles was also read.

It was with much enthusiasm that D Erik subsequently drew attention to the agenda, described as 'quite a varied programme'. This began with informal reports from all houses represented and opportunities for brief exchanges. To conclude the day we had a brief presentation on the topic of Absent Members. The second day began with a review of the General Chapter of 2017 with recommendations and new ideas and was followed by two particularly stimulating papers on Revitalisation and Coherence of Monastic Witness. On Friday we were very ably guided through the implications of *Cor Orans* for all houses of contemplative nuns worldwide and given significant insight into matters pertaining to the draft statute on fragile communities. We also had the regional secretary for formation, Sr. Sarah, visit that afternoon, to present her report; as a result of which she found herself re-elected, by acclamation, for a further 3 year term.

The impact of the temporary appointment of Fathers Immediate at the last General Chapter generated considerable interest and was followed by a very clear presentation on the latest developments and requirements involved in safeguarding matters. By this time we were delighted to sit and watch a most stimulating film on ecological initiatives which paved the way for Sunday's sharing of the many and varied undertakings already underway in the region, as well as those planned for the near future.

The final day was particularly busy with a report from the Editor of the Regional Newsletter, (and his re-election by popular acclamation!), a presentation on the *Experientia* programme, and consideration of library matters. We also covered the topics of the possible establishment of a common fund for the Order and discussed the establishment of a regional register of competent people who might offer assistance to individual houses.

The election of the next Abbot General and new members of his council was of great interest to all as were the suggested themes for the General Chapter of 2020.

So many things contributed to the fruitfulness of this meeting: the warmth of welcome, prayerful liturgy meticulously prepared by the host community and beautifully accompanied on the organ; the wonderfully fraternal atmosphere and the amazingly mild and sunny weather—all of which were hugely appreciated by every participant.

VOTES & STATEMENTS

I. PROPOSALS FOR THE ORGANISATION OF THE GENERAL CHAPTER IN 2020

I.1 We ask that a single *plenary* session be devoted to discussion of the Regional Reports instead of referring these to the Commissions.

YES 19 NO 0 ABSTENTION 0 **ACCEPTED**

I.2 We ask the Coordinating Commission to be strict in imposing the standards of the Chapter for the submission of commissions' reports: they should be presented on time and not be too long.

YES 19 NO 0 ABSTENTION 0 **ACCEPTED**

I.3 We ask that every effort be made to have a sufficiency of competent translators of texts, to ensure continuity of discussion.

YES 18 NO 0 ABSTENTION 1 **ACCEPTED**

I.4 Keen to work towards a paperless Chapter, we ask that options for the use of tablets or other digital equipment be investigated to enable distribution of texts without recourse to printing.

YES 18 NO 0 ABSTENTION 1 **ACCEPTED**

I.5 We wish there to be no set theme for the Chapter or house reports.

YES 18 NO 0 ABSTENTION 1 **ACCEPTED**

I.6 We ask for a series of themed conferences given by capitulants throughout the Chapter and present (in section 2) suggestions for themes.

YES 18 NO 0 ABSTENTION 1 **ACCEPTED**

I.7 We wish to see it confirmed that *ad hoc* commissions need not be elected by the Chapter as a whole but can be appointed by the Coordinating Commission with the approval of the Abbot General and his council.

YES 18 NO 0 ABSTENTION 1 **ACCEPTED**

I.8 We wish the Chapter of 2020 to establish (as did the Chapter of 2017) a special commission to check, and where necessary correct, the formulation of votes.

YES 18 NO 0 ABSTENTION 1 **ACCEPTED**

1.9 We wish to maintain the established format of celebrating Lauds together (using the three official languages) followed by Mass.

YES 16 NO 0 ABSTENTION 3 **ACCEPTED**

1.10 We encourage the elaboration of more satisfactory procedures for distributing Holy Communion at Mass.

YES 16 NO 0 ABSTENTION 3 **ACCEPTED**

1.11 We wish to maintain the established format of celebrating Vespers in language groups.

YES 16 NO 0 ABSTENTION 3 **ACCEPTED**

1.12 We wish to use the basilica of Santa Maria degli Angeli for the opening and closing Masses of the Chapter, if at all possible.

YES 16 NO 1 ABSTENTION 2 **ACCEPTED**

1.13 We wish to keep Sunday afternoons free.

YES 17 NO 0 ABSTENTION 2 **ACCEPTED**

1.14 We propose that, after the end of the Chapter, the Coordinating Commission invite feedback and suggestions for improvement from the secretarial staff.

YES 18 NO 0 ABSTENTION 1 **ACCEPTED**

2. PROPOSALS FOR THEMED CONFERENCES AT THE CHAPTER

We suggest two topics as a possible orientation for themed conferences at the Chapter.

- A. *Revitalisation of Cistercian values and observance.* Grateful for the gift of our Cistercian calling to seek God in community, we ask the General Chapter of 2020 to encourage us to an ever deeper confidence in our monastic observances. Having focused on our fragilities in recent years, we ask the General Chapter to help our communities revitalise our monastic contemplative orientation in the spirit of the Rule of St Benedict (silence, lectio, community life, work, prayer, continuing conversion). Mindful of the riches of our Cistercian charism, we ask the General Chapter to renew us in our desire to foster and transmit this life, so that we may move into the future with hope, good zeal and the joy of Gospel living.
- B. *Exercise of government.* The role of the superior is crucial for any movement toward revitalisation of a community: he/she should be able to articulate and nurture a vision of the life that the community is capable of embracing; he/she should believe that his/her understanding and vision of the monastic life will bring hope to the community; his/her relationship with the community needs to be one of accompaniment, presence and leadership by example. We ask that the Central Commission, in any directives they plan to put on the agenda of the General Chapter dealing with revitalisation, highlight especially the role of the superior in this endeavour.

2.1 We approve these suggestions.

YES 19 NO 0 ABSTENTION 0 **ACCEPTED**

3. *COR ORANS*

After a fruitful, thorough discussion, we produced the following statement:

Our Order is comprised of monasteries of monks and nuns. Through much hard work and effort we have developed structures of communion and a body of proper law which are well-established, regularly reviewed and renewed, respond to our actual needs, and adequately serve our monastic life in today's Church and world. Updates to our Constitutions have been regularly approved by the Holy See.

We earnestly wish that there be one legislation for monks and nuns in the Order insofar as possible, and that no artificial divisions between us be introduced simply to respond to *Cor orans*. The nuns of our Order are in a quite different situation than most other nuns worldwide, concern for whom prompted the Holy Father's attention in *Vultum Dei quaerere* and *Cor orans*.

Concerning the duration of the periods of initial formation, experience shows that our existing structure (postulancy at the discretion of the superior, but generally 6-9 months; two years of novitiate; at least three years in temporary vows) is suitable and fruitful. We encourage the development of our existing initial formation programme so that it extends to include the first two or three years immediately following solemn profession, and particular pastoral accompaniment of the newly solemnly professed.

We recommend (a) a revision of the nuns' Constitutions C.13, C.62, and C.29 and (b) that we ask the Holy See for an exemption from all the other requirements of *Cor orans*.

It is our understanding that, during the time of waiting in hope for the granting of this exemption, we can continue to live by our existing proper law.

3.1 We approve the above statement.

YES 19 NO 0 ABSTENTION 0 **ACCEPTED**

3.2 We recommend that the President of the Law Commission be present in an advisory capacity during the Chapter's discussion of *Cor orans*.

YES 16 NO 1 ABSTENTION 2 **ACCEPTED**

4. CONSTITUTION 67 AND THE STATUTE ON DIMINISHING COMMUNITIES

Having studied the Constitution and draft Statute, aware of the complex issues involved and the consequent need for clear legislation, we make the following observations:

Suggestions regarding the draft Statute:

n. 9 The Father Immediate should be included in the Commission for the Future, otherwise there could be a crossing of lines of authority. We propose: 'A Commission for the Future, which would include the Fr Immediate, will be established...'

n. 10 Why is there mention of 'a lay *employee*'? The person could be a volunteer or have some other relationship with the community, region or diocese. Should it say rather 'a lay person'?

nn. 18-20 The order of procedure could be improved. We suggest: in n. 18, a written report of the Father Immediate; in n. 19, consultation with the diocesan bishop; in n. 20 m & f, 'Only the General Chapter ...' In n. 19 it seems necessary to say who consults with the bishop. Is it the Father Immediate?

n. 21 Is it necessary to specify when the Commission created in n. 9 ceases?

n. 25 Further orientations about the disposal of goods would be welcome. It seems opportune to stress that the community's goods are ecclesiastical goods (*CIC* 635 §1) and should be disposed of for the 'proper objectives' of the Church mentioned in canon 1254 §1 and §2, i.e. 'the regulation of divine worship, the provision of fitting support for clergy and other ministers, and the carrying out of works of the sacred apostolate and of charity, especially for the needy.' In the disposal of goods, communities are urged to keep the needs of the Order/the Commission of Aid for the Order/the poorer monasteries of the Order in mind.

Does there not need to be a final closure of the process, so a new n. 27? We suggest: 'It is the responsibility of the General Chapter to state when the process of the suppression of a monastery has been concluded.' There is always the possibility of a court case or something of that nature addressing some aspect of the process, but that would involve 're-opening' the closed process.

A request for clarification regarding the draft Statute:

n. 10 The suspension of autonomy and the appointment of a Monastic Commissary could happen in contexts other than that of fragile communities. Should the explanation of the role and details of appointment be placed somewhere else in the Constitutions (not in C. 34, which concerns the Abbot's power of governance, or in C. 67, which concerns suppression)?

Regarding the new stability of members of a suppressed community, clearer guidelines are needed:

The right of such members to obtain stability in another house without the need for a vote must to be clarified. We refer to C. 60, C. 67, and nn. 22-24 of the draft Statute.

The problematic issues of the previous Statute 67,2 highlighted by Dom Armand in the Annex to the draft Statute have not been sufficiently addressed:

- At the time of suppression there must be a monastery of the Order to which the members of the suppressed house have the right to go without a vote of that monastery's conventual chapter.
- This should apply to *all* members of the community, irrespective of how they came to have stability in it—whether they were founders, entered that community, transferred to it from another house, or moved there after the suppression of a daughter house.
- It needs to be established how this house of new stability is designated.
- When one community founds (or accepts paternity of) another, it assumes lasting responsibilities. This should be clearly stated.
- Members having changed their stability to a foundation when this became autonomous may currently, if the foundation is suppressed, return to their monastery of first profession without a vote of the conventual chapter (C. 60). However, should they not also have the right to go to the same monastery designated for the rest of the suppressed community, if this is other than their own monastery of profession?

4.1 We approve the above observations.

YES NO ABSTENTION **ACCEPTED**

5. THE MINISTRY OF FATHERS IMMEDIATE

5.1 We request the appointment, from the beginning of the Chapter, of an *ad hoc* committee to review the changes in (or delegations of) paternity recommended by the Chapter of 2017 and, on the basis of this review, to present a report to the Chapter.

YES 19 NO ABSTENTION **ACCEPTED**

5.2 Seeing that delegations made at the Chapter of 2017 will cease at the Chapter of 2020, we ask that all communities affected by changes in (or delegations of) paternity be invited to reflect with their Father Immediate and his delegate on their experience during these three years and to formulate that experience in a written statement to the *ad hoc* commission, indicating the orientation they would like to follow.

YES 18 NO ABSTENTION 1 **ACCEPTED**

6. SAFEGUARDING

6.1 We ask the General Chapter to affirm our Order's commitment to safeguarding, in line with Dom Eamon's letter on this subject of June 2015.

YES 17 NO 0 ABSTENTION 2 **ACCEPTED**

6.2 We ask that a line be added to n. 16 of the *Statute on the Regular Visitation*, instructing Visitors to ensure that communities visited have an effective safeguarding policy, and that this policy is observed.

YES 18 NO 0 ABSTENTION 1 **ACCEPTED**

7. THE QUESTION OF COMMON FUNDS

7.1 We are in favour of creating a new/common fund for the whole Order.

YES 2 NO 15 ABSTENTION 2 **REJECTED**

7.2 Full of appreciation for the work of the Commission of Aid and the Finance Commission, we favour the maintenance and development of the Order's existing structures for financial administration and mutual assistance.

YES 16 NO 1 ABSTENTION 2 **ACCEPTED**

8. PASTORAL CARE OF ABSENT MEMBERS

Having discussed this question, we produced the following statement:

We suggest that the Order study the topic “Care of Absent Members”, with a view eventually to drawing up a Statement of Best Practice in relation to such situations (especially exclaustation). Such practices might include

- having a designated contact person in the community to keep in touch with the absent member,
- having an agreement about how and when to keep in contact,
- the desirability of having a written statement about finances for the absent member during the time of absence,
- having clarity about the duties and responsibilities of both the member and the community/superior during the time of absence.

8.1 We approve the above recommendation.

YES NO ABSTENTION **ACCEPTED**

9. THE ABBOT GENERAL'S COUNCILLORS

It appears that there are ambiguities in our legislation regarding the appointment and mandate of the Abbot General's Councillors. We consider it opportune to have the following questions clarified:

- When exactly does a Councillor's mandate begin and end?
- When Councillor are constrained to leave the Council (e.g. on being elected superiors in their communities), do their appointed substitutes take on the departed Councillors' mandates?
- Should there be a limit to the number of consecutive terms a Councillor can serve?
- Should there be an age limit for Councillors?

9.1 We approve the above requests for clarification.

YES NO ABSTENTION **ACCEPTED**

10. ELECTIONS AND APPOINTMENTS

Br Adam of Mount Saint Bernard was elected to represent the Region's delegates at the General Chapter of 2020, Sr Christina of Tautra being his deputy.

Sr Sarah of Glencairn was re-appointed by acclamation to continue as Secretary for Formation.

Fr Jan of Caldey was re-appointed by acclamation to continue as Editor of the Newsletter.

EVALUATION

This meeting was held by all participants to have been a resounding success. Under the excellent and efficient chairmanship of D Erik and D Daniel, an amazing amount of ground was covered at a good pace without anyone feeling rushed. The agenda was well timetabled and balanced, presentations were solidly introduced and there was good participation. The clarity of thought throughout was appreciated, the steady momentum and the positive atmosphere experienced as fruitful, revitalising and prophetic. In addition everyone was pleased by the environmentally motivated first attempt to save paper through widespread employment of digital devices.

There were but two suggestions which might improve future meetings—some form of amplification for those who found it hard to hear and perhaps the use of a computer application like DROPBOX where discussion papers could be posted and easily accessed by participants without the need for numerous emails.

D Erik expressed special thanks to the brethren of Roscrea for their hospitality and Sr. Fiachra for her work before concluding with a prayer of thanksgiving.

