

READING GUIDE

TO FACILITATE DIALOGUE AND
REFLECTION ON THE CIRCULAR
LETTER OF THE ABBOT GENERAL TO
THE ORDER, 20 JANUARY 2026



This reading guide aims to assist readers of the circular letter of the Abbot General to the Order of 20 January 2026 by providing questions for reflection and dialogue.

There are questions for the introduction and the three chapters of the circular letter. These questions can be used both individually and within the community.

From page 13 onwards, a more extensive format is included, which may be more suitable for dialogue meetings within communities or in smaller groups.

We hope to promote reflection and dialogue on the circular letter with this guide.

Rome, March 2026

PART I



I. INTRODUCTION

Short Summary

The introduction situates the circular letter of the Abbot General within the broader tradition of Christian and monastic reflection on poverty and humility. Drawing on Scripture, the Apostolic Exhortation *Dilexi te* of Pope Leo XIV, and the heritage of the Cistercian Fathers, it presents poverty not as an ideology or mere external condition, but as a way of following Christ who “became poor for our sake.” Poverty and humility are shown as inseparable attitudes that lead to solidarity with the poor and deeper conformity to the Heart of Christ. The introduction also places this reflection within the continuity of Pope Francis’ teaching on the love of Christ and the poor, grounding it firmly in the Gospel and monastic tradition.

Questions for Group Sharing

1. **Personal resonance:**
Which image or phrase from the introduction touched you most, and why did it resonate with your own experience of faith or community life?

2. **Poverty and humility:**
How do you understand the link between poverty and humility in your own life? Where do you experience tension between these ideals and daily reality?
 3. **Encountering Christ:**
The text speaks of returning to “the Heart of Jesus Christ.” Where, in your own experience, have you encountered Christ most clearly through simplicity, limitation, or vulnerability?
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Closing Suggestion for the Group

You may wish to end the conversation by allowing each participant to name **one word or short phrase** that expresses what they are taking with them from the discussion—without explanation—simply as a shared listening moment.

II. CHAPTER I – *Reasons for this Circular Letter*

Short Summary

Chapter I explains why this circular letter is being written now. It is an invitation to communities to read *Dilexi te* together and to translate its message into concrete forms of life. The chapter highlights the danger of indifference toward the poor and critiques a culture driven by comfort, accumulation, and inequality. It broadens the understanding of poverty beyond material lack to include social, spiritual, cultural, and relational forms of poverty—both within society and within monastic communities themselves. The chapter challenges monks and nuns to examine inequalities within the Order and to renew their commitment to solidarity, mutual care, and a preferential love for the poor as a path of renewal for Church, monastic life and society.

Questions for Group Sharing

- 1. Looking in the mirror:**
The Abbot General asks, “Do we dare to look into the mirror of these words?”
What feelings or thoughts arise in you

when you apply this question to your own life or community?

2. **Forms of poverty:**

Which forms of poverty mentioned in this chapter do you recognize most strongly—either in yourself, in your community, or in the wider world? How are these usually addressed, or overlooked?

3. **From reflection to life:**

What might it mean, concretely, for your community to move from reflection to action without turning care for the poor into just another activity rather than a way of life?

Closing Suggestion for the Group

You may wish to end the conversation by allowing each participant to name **one word or short phrase** that expresses what they are taking with them from the discussion—without explanation—simply as a shared listening moment.

III. CHAPTER II – *Care for the Poor in Monastic Life*

Short Summary

Chapter II explores how care for the poor is intrinsic to monastic life, drawing especially on the witnesses of **St. Basil, St. Benedict, and St. Bernard**, and on the lived example of the brothers of Tibhirine. Poverty is presented not primarily as something monks or nuns “do for” the poor, but as a **shared condition of life** lived with them. Manual labor, hospitality, and compassion are shown as concrete expressions of solidarity that resist the logic of accumulation and exclusion. True monastic poverty creates an “economy of solidarity” in which work, prayer, humility, and care for the vulnerable—inside and outside the community—belong together.

Questions for Group Sharing

1. **Work and solidarity:**
The chapter emphasizes work not as a means of charity, but as a way of being “poor with the poor.” How do you experience the meaning of your own

work in relation to others—does it connect you, distance you, or both?

2. **Hospitality and limits:**

Hospitality is described as sharing, caring, and listening, rooted in simplicity rather than abundance.

Where do you experience hospitality as life-giving, and where do you feel its limits or tensions?

3. **The poor among us:**

The text reminds us that poverty also exists *within* communities (weakness, sickness, marginalization). Who are “the poor” in your immediate context, and how does your community respond to them in practice?

Closing Suggestion for the Group

You may wish to end the conversation by allowing each participant to name **one word or short phrase** that expresses what they are taking with them from the discussion—without explanation—simply as a shared listening moment.

IV. CHAPTER III – *An Evangelical View of Poverty*

Short Summary

Chapter III deepens the reflection by presenting poverty through an evangelical lens. Poverty is not idealized, but understood as a place where **human dignity, encounter with God, and the call to love and justice** become visible. The poor are not objects of pity, but bearers of God's presence who challenge the Church and society. Poverty of spirit is linked to humility, dependence on God, and openness to the future God gives. Drawing on theology, Scripture, and monastic wisdom, the chapter shows poverty as a path to freedom, truth, and deeper communion rather than deprivation or failure.

Questions for Group Sharing

1. **Dignity and poverty:**
The chapter insists that human dignity does not depend on success or possessions. Where have you seen dignity revealed most clearly in

situations of limitation or fragility—
either your own or others’?

2. **Poverty as encounter:**
Poverty is described as a place where God speaks and becomes present. Can you recall a moment when vulnerability, loss, or dependence unexpectedly became a place of encounter with God?
3. **Freedom and attachment:**
Poverty is linked to freedom from possession and control. What are you most tempted to hold onto—for security, identity, or status—and how might letting go open space for trust and hope?

Optional Closing for Each Session

Invite participants to complete one of these sentences in a single phrase:

- *“What stays with me is...”*
- *“I feel invited to...”*
- *“This chapter challenges me to...”*

Allow silence between responses, honoring listening as part of the shared reflection.

PART II



Below is a **complete 4-meeting group program** based on the text, designed for communal reading, prayerful reflection, and shared experience.

Each meeting can last **60–90 minutes** and follows the same clear rhythm to support depth and continuity.

Four-Session Group Program

“God Has Loved You” – Poverty, Humility, and Care for the Poor

Based on the circular letter 2026 of the Abbot General reflecting on *Dilexi te*

GENERAL STRUCTURE (for every meeting)

1. Opening (5–10 min)

- Short silence

- Opening prayer or Scripture
- Brief reminder of the session's focus

2. Reading & Summary (10–15 min)

- Read selected passages aloud (one or more readers)
- Facilitator offers the prepared short summary

3. Personal Reflection (5 min)

- Silent reflection
- Invite participants to notice what touches, resists, or unsettles them

4. Group Sharing (30–40 min)

- Share from personal experience, not debate
- No cross-talk; listening is central

5. Closing (5–10 min)

- One-word or one-sentence takeaway
- Closing prayer or silence

MEETING 1

Christ Who Became Poor – Setting the Spiritual Horizon

(Introduction)

Focus

Poverty and humility as revealed in Christ and rooted in the Heart of the Gospel.

Short Summary

The introduction grounds the entire letter in the mystery of Christ who freely chose poverty out of love. Poverty and humility are inseparable and belong to the heart of monastic tradition and Christian discipleship. The call is not moralistic but relational: to return to Christ's heart and to recognize poverty as a way of communion, not ideology or heroism.

Questions for Sharing

1. **Personal encounter:**
Which image or phrase from the introduction speaks most strongly to your own journey of faith or vocation?
2. **Poverty & humility:**
Where do you experience poverty or limitation as opening you to God—and where do you experience resistance or fear?
3. **Heart of Christ:**
What does it mean for you, personally, to return to “the Heart of Jesus Christ” at this stage of your life?

Suggested Scripture

- 2 Corinthians 8:9
- Philippians 2:6–11

MEETING 2

Why This Call, Why Now?

(Chapter I – Reasons for this Circular Letter)

Focus

Indifference, inequality, and the many forms of poverty—inside and outside the community.

Short Summary

This chapter explains the urgency of the letter. It challenges the culture of comfort, accumulation, and inequality, and expands the notion of poverty beyond material lack to include social, spiritual, cultural, and relational poverty. Communities are invited to examine themselves honestly and to renew solidarity as a path of conversion and renewal.

Questions for Sharing

1. **Looking in the mirror:**
Which questions in this chapter felt most confronting or uncomfortable—and why?
2. **Invisible poverty:**
Which forms of poverty do you notice most around you or within your community, and how are they usually treated?
3. **Conversion of mentality:**
What small but real change in attitude or practice might this chapter be inviting from you personally?

Suggested Scripture

- Luke 10:25–37 (Good Samaritan)
- Matthew 25:31–46

MEETING 3

Work, Hospitality, and Shared Life

(Chapter II – Care for the Poor in Monastic Life)

Focus

Being poor *with* the poor: work, hospitality, and solidarity as a way of life.

Short Summary

Chapter II shows that care for the poor is not an “extra” activity but part of the structure of monastic life. Through the examples of Basil, Benedict, Bernard, and Tibhirine, poverty appears as shared condition, not charitable distance. Work, hospitality, and compassion create an economy of solidarity that resists exclusion and accumulation.

Questions for Sharing

1. **Meaning of work:**
How does your daily work connect you to others—or separate you from them?
2. **Hospitality as vulnerability:**
Where does hospitality in your life feel

genuine and mutual, and where does it become functional or protected?

3. **The poor among us:**

Who are the vulnerable, difficult, or marginalized persons “among us,” and how do we actually relate to them?

Suggested Scripture

- Acts 2:42–47
- Rule of St. Benedict, ch. 53
(Hospitality)

MEETING 4

Poverty as Freedom, Encounter, and Hope

(Chapter III – An Evangelical View of Poverty & Conclusion)

Focus

Poverty as dignity, encounter with God, and source of renewal.

Short Summary

The final chapter presents poverty through an evangelical lens: not as deprivation, but as a space where dignity, dependence on God, and love become visible. Poverty of spirit opens the way to humility, freedom, and hope. The witness of new foundations and the tradition of the Order show that caring for the poor is ultimately a form of prayer and trust in God's future.

Questions for Sharing

1. **Dignity revealed:**
Where have you seen human dignity shine most clearly in weakness or fragility?
2. **Letting go:**
What attachments—material, emotional, or spiritual—are hardest for you to release?
3. **Hope forward:**
After these four meetings, what do you sense God might be asking of you or your community next?

Suggested Scripture

- Matthew 5:1–12
- Psalm 34:6–7

FINAL CLOSING (optional)

End the fourth meeting with a shared prayer or a simple round where each participant completes one sentence:

“What I carry forward from this journey is...”

Allow silence between responses.

Prayers for the Four Sessions

SESSION 1

Christ Who Became Poor

Opening Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ,
You were rich, yet for our sake you became poor.
You did not cling to power or security,
but trusted the love of the Father completely.

Open our hearts
to receive your way of humility and freedom.
Strip us of what we grasp too tightly,
and lead us into the joy of dependence on God.

May this time together
bring us closer to your Heart,
where love is given without measure
and poverty becomes communion.

Amen.

SESSION 2

Why This Call, Why Now?

Opening or Closing Prayer

God of compassion,
You hear the cry of the poor
and you do not turn your face away.

Give us courage
to look honestly at our lives and our
communities.
Free us from indifference,
from comfort that closes our hearts,
from fear that keeps us silent.

Teach us to recognize
the many faces of poverty—
in the world, in our communities,
and within ourselves.

May your Spirit disturb what needs to change
and strengthen what already bears life.

Amen.

SESSION 3

Work, Hospitality, and Shared Life

Prayer

God of the poor and the worker,
You labored with human hands
and shared the bread of daily life.

Bless our work,
not only for what it produces,
but for how it binds us to one another.
Keep us from working above others,
and teach us to work beside them.

Make our homes places of welcome,
where sharing is simple,
listening is patient,
and no one is excluded.

May our life together
become an economy of solidarity
that reflects your Kingdom.

Amen.

SESSION 4

Poverty as Freedom, Encounter, and Hope

Closing Prayer

Faithful God,
You meet us not in strength alone
but in weakness, longing, and trust.

Teach us the poverty of spirit
that opens space for your future.
Help us to let go
of what we use to protect ourselves,
so that we may receive life as gift.

May our care for the poor
become prayer,
our humility become freedom,
and our hope rest in you alone.

Send us forward lightly equipped,
trusting your promise,
and walking in love.

Amen.

**OPTIONAL SHORT
REFRAIN (for silence or
repetition)**

*“Jesus, poor and humble of heart,
make our hearts like yours.”*