

NEWS AND ANNOUNCEMENTS FROM THE GENERALATE

Formation
programme
on prayer



Prayer is the joy of life

At the invitation of *KTO – Télévision Catholique* (France), Dom Olivier Quenardel, Abbot Emeritus of Cîteaux, has recorded a series of sixteen short reflections on prayer. Owing to the richness of their doctrinal content and the clear, engaging way in which they are presented, making them accessible to a wide audience, they provide an excellent resource for both initial and ongoing formation.

To encourage a deeper engagement with the material, the Commission for Formation has prepared two questions for each reflection: the first for personal reflection and the second for community sharing and discussion. In this way, the series offers a formation programme that harmoniously integrates both the personal and communitarian dimensions of the prayer.

The booklet we have prepared includes links to the videos (each lasting three to four minutes and featuring English subtitles), a full transcript of each reflection, and the accompanying questions to guide further reflection. This formation resource was published on the Order's website in March of this year; however, we wish to remind you that it remains available in the Formation section:

<https://www.ocso.org/resources/all-documents/?category=formation&folder=prayer-program>

We express our gratitude to Dom Olivier and to KTO for their generous permission to publish these videos and their accompanying texts.

NEWS FROM THE REGIONS



USA
Fr. Isaac Slater
(Genesee)

In the US Region the superiors chose to appoint a group of 4 rather than a single secretary of formation. We have been meeting for about a year and it is working quite well. Some recent events and initiatives include:

- 2 of us meet monthly on Zoom with all the monks and nuns in initial formation to discuss a short text from a Cistercian writer
- periodically another member of the commission meets with those in the first 5 years of solemn vows (also by Zoom)
- beginning in January we will offer a series of juniorate formation courses for communities who choose to participate
- we are trying to supplement the annual junior seminar with shorter in-person gatherings for those houses within driving distance of one another (twice a year for two full days plus travel)
- we are creating a regional blog to share info between communities on formation initiatives

- in February we held our annual junior seminar at Holy Cross Abbey (Berryville) with Michael Gorman (scripture scholar) and Sr Maria Gonzalo presenting (Cistercian fathers)
- in June the novice directors for the region met at New Clairvaux Abbey (Vina) and took part in a workshop on accompaniment with Francois Diouf OSB. We also discussed the prospect of updating the *Ratio*.

The “OCSO-France” Internovitiate



Dom Pierre-
André
(Cîteaux)

This year, the OCSO-France Internovitiate celebrates the tenth anniversary of its foundation (2016–2026). Its establishment was one of the outcomes of the reflection undertaken by the abbots and abbesses of the Order's French monasteries, who sought to pool certain community services. Initial formation (for postulants and novices) soon emerged as an obvious priority. Given the small number of candidates in each monastery, even when grouped into two broad geographical areas (roughly speaking, the eastern and western halves of France), would it not be better to combine our resources rather than disperse them? A team of three people, led by an abbot, was therefore appointed to assess the needs and to develop practical proposals for implementing the project. Particular care was taken to respect the expectations and hopes of each community, while also preserving their freedom to participate—or not—in the programme. From the outset, it was understood that communities choosing not to take part were entirely free to do so, and that each community could decide which, if any, of the modules it wished to attend.

Although originally intended solely for the Cistercian communities of France, the OCSO-France Internovitiate gradually expanded to embrace other contexts, both geographically (French-speaking Belgium and Switzerland) and spiritually, by welcoming participants from several Benedictine monasteries.

Modelled on the STIM (*Studium Intermonastères*), which is dedicated primarily to the theological formation of young professed, the OCSO-France Internovitiate complements the

formation provided within each monastery. It offers postulants and novices three one-week sessions each year (normally from Monday to Friday), held in turn at a Benedictine or Cistercian monastery. These gatherings are “doubly mixed”: they bring together both Benedictines (OSB) and Cistercians (OCSO), as well as monks and nuns. Over a three-year cycle (the postulancy year followed by the two years of novitiate), participants explore together the essential “foundations” of the consecrated life lived in the school of Saint Benedict and in the spiritual tradition of the Cistercian Fathers. These “foundations” are organised into six complementary and interconnected modules: The Rule of Saint Benedict and the Western monastic tradition (including, at least once during the three-year cycle, a session devoted specifically to a Cistercian Father); General anthropology; Religious life and the vows; Prayer and the liturgy; Community and fraternal life; Affectivity and sexuality. The speakers are usually monks or nuns, although non-religious specialists are occasionally invited. Each session includes the presence of a psychologist, who is available for personal accompaniment of any novice who wishes to meet with them, while also providing professional supervision for the novice masters and novice mistresses.

Ten years of this programme of initial formation demonstrate that it meets a genuine need. In any case, it enables those who will one day assume responsibility within our communities to come to know one another and to build strong fraternal bonds—seeds of future collaboration and mutual support in the years to come.

To conclude this brief presentation, however, I would like to give the final word to Brother Mathieu, a novice of Cîteaux who is now approaching the end of his novitiate. His testimony will speak more eloquently than any further explanation could.

Br. Mathieu
(Cîteaux)

Since entering the monastery, I have taken part in seven inter-novitiate sessions on a variety of themes: 'Monastic Asceticism' (Scourmont), 'Praying with the Body in the School of Saint Dominic' (Aiguebelle), 'The Degrees of Humility and Pride in Saint Bernard' (Cîteaux), 'The Rule of Saint Benedict' (Orval), 'The Liturgy' (La Pierre-Qui-Vire, OSB), '*Lectio Divina*' (Cîteaux), and 'The Growth of the Person in Religious Life (Theological Anthropology)' (La Coudre). The next session will take place at Échourgnac and will focus on the theme of 'Religious Vows'.

In addition to the varied and stimulating teaching, another major benefit of these sessions is the opportunity to experience the wider dimensions of the Order and even of other monastic traditions (O.Cist., OSB), in an atmosphere of genuinely fraternal encounters and exchanges. This 'fraternity of postulants and novices' seems to me to be at least as important as the assimilation of theoretical teaching: it provides a setting for mutual support among those who are 'beginners in the monastic life' and is probably a valuable aid in discerning one's own vocation. The internovitiate: 'a school of good zeal' (RB 72)!

Intermonastic Theological Formation of Madagascar



RAFMA

Sr. Annie

Lydia

(Ampibanjinana)

Summary of the Session held from 11 to 22 May 2026 at Our Lady of Maromby Monastery, 31 brothers and sisters took part: Poor Clares: 8; Benedictine Sisters: 8; Trappistine: 1; Trappist Monks: 9; Benedictine Monks: 5.

Fr Justin OCSO gave a course in the field of Canon Law on “**The Teaching Office of the Church**” (Can. 747–833). This section comprises 86 canons and deals with preaching, catechesis, schools, Catholic institutes and universities, and the use of the media. Its purpose is to fulfil the *mandatum*: “Go into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature” (Mk 16:15). To bring the session into dialogue with current issues, we also examined the Church’s position on Artificial Intelligence in the mission of evangelization. Popes Francis and Leo XIV have adopted a stance of “proactive discernment.” Furthermore, *Magnifica Humanitas* affirms that AI is a product of human ingenuity but must never replace human judgement or responsibility.

Fr Chrisanthe, a diocesan priest, spoke on **Ecclesiology**. Drawing on *Lumen Gentium*, he developed his presentation around themes such as: The foundations of the Church: an institution willed by God; its source and summit are found in the Eucharist. He then explored the principal theological images of the Church: The Church as the People of God; the Church as the Body of Christ; the Church as the Temple of the Holy Spirit; the Church as Sacrament and Ecumenical Communion. In short, the Church does not exist for herself; her mission is to bear witness to the Gospel through an ongoing synodal dialogue with today’s world.

Sr Céline (Auxiliatrices) developed the theme of **Communication**. In very simple terms, Sister explained to the students that “All our communication emerges from the past and is directed towards the future.” It forms part of our lives and of our ever-changing environment. Consequently, our communication needs to change and must constantly adapt to our experiences and our aspirations. A statement such as “Will you marry me?” has a history and, naturally, many future implications; it is much more than a simple combination of words. Even apparently simple communications such as “Phone me this evening,” “Read the next chapter,” or “What would you like to eat?” allow us first to trace a series of previous associations, but also to consider the possible consequences of our responses. Thus, in this process, Sister said, feedback is crucial; and “what has been said has been said” (cf. Jn 19:22).

Fr Théo, Salesian, presented the **History of Modern Philosophy**. As a true philosopher, he first outlined the five philosophical movements that have shaped philosophy: Humanism,

the Scientific Revolution, Rationalism, Empiricism, and Enlightenment. He then gave an overview of Ancient Philosophy through Stoicism, Epicureanism, and Scepticism, before turning to the history of Modern Philosophy (from the 17th to the late 18th century). This period marked a major turning point by placing the human person and human reason at the centre of the world, thus freeing them from the theological framework of the Middle Ages.

Formation, Renewal and Hope in Nigerian Monastic Communities



RAFMA
Fr. Eugene
(Awhum)

Monastic life in Nigeria continues to grow through strong formation, collaboration and creative responses to contemporary challenges. Monastic history is marked by continual renewal, and Nigerian Benedictine and Cistercian communities are actively embracing this tradition: each generation has sought new ways of preserving the richness of the contemplative tradition while responding faithfully to the signs of the times.

A major development is the BECAN Formation Institute, founded in 2018 to provide a unified, two year theological and monastic formation for solemnly professed monks and nuns. Its curriculum integrates Scripture, theology, monastic spirituality and human development, strengthened by academic affiliation with CIWA. The Institute fosters shared identity and collaboration among Nigerian monasteries.

Complementing this is the annual BECAN Formators' Programme, offering ongoing formation for vocation directors and formators. Every three years, AIM sponsors an extended international session, reinforcing that formation is a lifelong process of conversion.

Communities are also investing in specialized training for future formators, sending suitable members to national institutes and the Monastic Formators' Programme in Rome.

Human formation has become a priority. One community has integrated courses on temperaments, Enneagram, Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI), Catholic Understanding of Human Sexuality, emotional maturity and relationships, recognizing that authentic monastic life requires whole person development.

Some communities have introduced a discernment period before Simple Profession, allowing novices to spend time with family after the novitiate. This practice strengthens freedom and clarity of vocation.

Facing declining vocations, Nigerian monasteries are responding with creativity—social media outreach, parish talks, youth retreats and collaboration with diocesan vocation offices—trusting that the joy of consecrated life remains a powerful witness.

Monasteries are also preparing members in professional fields such as theology, canon law, medicine, engineering, agriculture, IT and education. These skills support community life and embody Benedictine stewardship.

Despite contemporary challenges—including economic pressures, changing family structures and fluctuating vocations—the future of Nigerian monasticism remains hopeful. Our communities continue to invest generously in formation because we believe that the future of the Order depends not merely upon numbers but upon the quality of the men and women who embrace this vocation.

Note: The full report (*Newsletter 40 RAFMA report*) is attached to this newsletter.

ORIENS Regional Formators Meeting



ORIENS
Fr. Samuel
(Tarrawarra)

From 15 to 23 May 2026, Guimaras, Philippines, welcomed 32 participants from monasteries across the ORIENS Region for the Regional Formators Meeting. The gathering offered a valuable opportunity to share experiences, deepen understanding of formation, and strengthen the bonds of fraternity.

One significant focus of the meeting was the sharing of formation reports from the various monasteries. Participants reflected on the current reality of formation in the region, which includes 51 people in formation: 6 postulants, 19 novices, 23 juniors, and 3 oblates-in-formation. These reports sparked lively conversations about the opportunities and challenges facing formation today.

A major highlight of the week was the series of lectures given by Dom Elias of Gethsemani. Through engaging presentations on Cistercian history, culture, and spirituality, he invited participants to rediscover the richness of the Order's heritage. His reflections on Cistercian

authors and formation resources encouraged formators to draw more deeply from the tradition while responding creatively to contemporary needs. Participants also benefited from discussions on Letter 17 of Adam of Perseigne and various practical aspects of formation ministry. Dom Elias's talks were widely appreciated for their depth, wisdom, and relevance.

The meeting was complemented by an enjoyable outing to Iloilo City. Visits to Molo Church, Museo Iloilo, the Cathedral of St Elizabeth of Hungary, and the Museum of Philippine Maritime History provided both cultural enrichment and a welcome opportunity for fellowship.

Marked by study, dialogue, prayer, and friendship, the gathering was a memorable experience for all. Participants returned to their communities renewed in their commitment to formation and encouraged by the shared vision and support of fellow formators.

Note: The full report (*Newsletter 40 ORIENS report*) is attached to this newsletter.

RE Formation Secretariat



RE
Sr. María
Ángeles
(Armenteira)

Initial Formation

- October 2025: Theology Course II.1 of the PREM (Regional Monastic Studies Programme), held at Cardeña Monastery.
- Easter 2026: Theology Course II.2 at San Isidro de Dueñas Monastery. Three monks who are not members of the RE also took part: two Cistercians and one Benedictine.
- October 2026: Theology Course III.1 will be held at Sobrado Monastery.

Ongoing Formation

- November 2025: An online course organised by the Hospitaller Sisters Foundation on palliative care, focusing on psychiatric disorders in old age.
- March 2026: Also held online and open to all the monasteries of REMILA, the course The Mysticism of Jesus: Christian Spirituality and Identity. It proved to be particularly valuable, as Christian mysticism and spirituality today face the challenge of the many different forms of

mystical experience currently on offer. The course was given by the Jesuit priest Fr Gabino Uríbarri.

- June 2026: The Novice Masters' Course took place at Monte Sión Monastery on the theme Accompanying Young People Today: Their Characteristics and Their Fears. The course was led by the priest Fr Lucas Buch.
- October 2026: Sr María José Pascual, O.Cist., of Casarrubios del Monte Monastery, will present the life and witness of Mother María Evangelista, foundress of the monastery and a Spanish mystic, who was declared Venerable by Pope Leo XIV in October 2025.
- November 2026: A session led by the Jesuit priest Fr Alberto Núñez on the theme Artificial Intelligence: Technological Revolution and Ethical Challenges.

For 2027, two formation events are planned: one on Cistercian architecture and another on St Gertrude.

On 22–24 August, we will hold the annual meeting of the Formation Secretariat. We shall welcome our new Coordinating Abbot, Fr Juan José Domingo, Abbot of San Isidro Monastery.

ISLES - Formation 2026–2027



ISLES
Sr. Sarah
(Glencairn)

The Region of the Isles continues to strengthen its formation program through courses that deepen our Cistercian identity, renew our communal life, and support the growth of our juniors and formators.

Origins of the Trappist Reform: Cultural Resources & Resistances (March 2026)

Fr James Orthmann OCSO delivered a three-day online course on the Trappist reform and the life of Armand Jean de Rancé. His conferences offered a vivid portrait of 17th century

monastic life, contrasting the austerity of La Trappe with the opulence of Louis XIV's court. Rancé's conviction that "the monk is a penitent" guided group reflections on the non-negotiables of monastic life today: authenticity, humility, and ongoing conversion grounded in grace. His ability to preserve the charism without "reproducing the past" encouraged communities to discern what the future may be offering.

***Communion in Community: Is There a Secret Sauce?* (March 2026)**

M. Eleanor Campion OCSO led the second part of the Isles formation course, exploring communion through a Trinitarian and incarnational lens. She highlighted the modern drift toward individualism and the need to reclaim a synodal, listening based communal life. Her five attitudes—prayer, respect, humility, patience, and wise judgement—became the basis for rich group sharing. She reminded us that the Constitutions already provide the "secret sauce" of communion through structures of communication, trust, and care.

***Chastity and Celibacy from a male perspective* (April–May 2026)**

Fr James Orthmann returned with a six-conference course for the male houses, presenting chastity and celibacy as communal practices rather than private virtues. Drawing on Jesus' integrated humanity, he emphasized self-knowledge, spiritual direction, friendship, and honest engagement with personal history. He noted that "sexually-related complications... may become assets for the vowed life," underscoring celibacy as a place of grace, creativity, and generativity.

***Running With Expanded Hearts: What St. Bernard Teaches us About Living a Magnanimous Life* (May 2026)**

Sr Grace Remington OCSO offered a retreat like course for those in initial formation, introducing St Bernard's teaching on magnanimity—largeness of soul rooted in trust in God. Her evidently wide knowledge of St Bernard and his writings was communicated in a style reminiscent of Merton's easy-going, down-to-earth humanity, which made the 12th century material more accessible and relatable as she linked Bernard's insights to personal stories and experiences.

Courses 2027

- *Formators Meeting* (Jan 2027): Sr Brenda Dolphin RSM will lead sessions on discernment, assessment, and accompaniment at Our Lady of Hying.
- *Online Course* (Feb 2027): Dom Benedict Hardy OSB will present on *the Rule of St Benedict*.
- *Initial Formation Course* (June 2027): Fr Simeon Leiva OCSO will focus on an applied scriptural exegesis: *Being-With-Jesus: The Heart of Cistercian Discipleship according to Mark 3:13-15*

Note: The full report (*Newsletter 40 ISLES report*) is attached to this newsletter.