

**STATUTES/GUIDELINES OF THE  
SOUTH FLORIDA LAY CISTERCIANS  
OUR LADY OF THE SACRED HEART**

Associated with the Lay Cistercians of the Abbey of Our Lady of the Holy Spirit  
Conyers, Georgia, USA

Prepared by the Lay-Cistercians of South Florida

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Revision**

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## **I. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF LAY CISTERCIANS OF SOUTH FLORIDA**

The Lay Cistercians of South Florida have been in existence since the fall of 1998. We are unique because there is no Cistercian monastery in our area. Our beginnings go back to a small group united under the leadership of a housewife and mother, Natalie Smith, connected to St. Andrew Parish in Coral Springs, Florida. On New Year's Day, 1999, five men and women flew to Holy Spirit Monastery in Conyers, Georgia, to meet with Fr. Anthony Delisi and the Lay Cistercians of Our Lady of the Holy Spirit. This group agreed to help us develop and grow. Under the direction of a Cistercian nun, Sr. Lillian Shank, who was living as a hermit in the Ft. Lauderdale area, we, the Lay Cistercians of South Florida, began our Cistercian adventure. As we became more organized, we adopted the name "Our Lady of the Sacred Heart."

On April 21, 2002, we became formally associated with Holy Spirit Monastery in Conyers, Georgia.

### **Summary Statement**

Lay Cistercians are persons, living in the world, who desire a lifestyle of continual conversion in order to "truly seek God" and to "prefer nothing whatever to Christ" (RB 2.11). Drawn together by the common inspiration of the Holy Spirit, we endeavor to live out the Cistercian charism as detailed by these statutes drawing from the spirit of the Rule of St. Benedict and the present Constitutions of the Cistercian Order of the Strict Observance.

### **Abbreviations used in these Guidelines:**

**RB** – Rule of Benedict with Chapter and verse from 'RB 1980'- *Translated by Timothy Fry, OSB* eg. (RB 67.4- 5)

**C** – Cistercians of Strict Observance 'Constitutions and Statutes' 1990 with Chapter and number. eg.( C.5 ST 5.A).

The Terms : Divine Office or Office, Work of God, Liturgy of the Hours all pertain to the same form of prayer.

**Lay Cistercian Vocation** As individuals, we recognize a personal call that is experienced in community as a gift from God. We define it as a call to be an active witness of Christ and his Church in the midst of the world, providing a prayerful and contemplative testimony in a life defined by the values of the Cistercian Charism. This life is guided by the Rule of Saint Benedict as a concrete way to interpret the Gospel, and by our Cistercian Fathers and Mothers. This personal call is a means of continuous conversion, one that leads to a rediscovery and deepening of the grace of our baptism and the

development of an adult faith.” (*International Assoc. of Lay Cistercian Comm. Lay Cistercian Identity-2008*)

## II. CISTERCIAN VALUES

### A. WE HOLD THE RULE OF ST. BENEDICT AS OUR GUIDE FOR LIVING THE GOSPEL IN OUR DAILY LIVES.

“ In 1969 the General Chapter, by its Declaration on Cistercian Life and Statute on Unity and Pluralism, reaffirmed the Order's commitment to the Rule of Saint Benedict as its traditional interpretation of the Gospel and gave guidelines for the faithful observance of this Rule in the changed conditions of the world.” (C. Pref. 3).

“The Cistercian Order of the Strict Observance has its origin in that monastic tradition of evangelical life that found expression in the Rule for Monasteries of Saint Benedict of Nursia. The founders of Cîteaux gave this tradition a particular form and the monasteries of the Strict Observance strongly defended certain of its principles. In 1892 the three congregations of the Strict Observance combined to form a single order, now called the Cistercian Order of the Strict Observance.” (C.1).

1. As Lay Cistercians we read and meditate on the Rule frequently in order to imbibe its wisdom and to apply this wisdom to our own life situation.
2. As the Rule teaches, we wish to learn to *"prefer nothing whatever to Christ"* (RB 72.11), and we wish to learn that *"good zeal which separates from evil and leads to God and everlasting life."* (RB 72.12).

### B. "WORK OF GOD"

The phrase *"Work of God"* is used to indicate the liturgical prayer of the hours of the Liturgy of the **Divine Office** (Liturgy of the Hours) that is sung regularly in monastic communities; in accordance with the Rule of Saint Benedict and the Constitution of the Cistercian Order of the Strict Observance, that, *"Nothing is to be preferred to the Work of God."* (RB 43.3 and C.19.1).

1. Each day we pray Lauds and Vespers or a simplified version of these offices.
2. Because it is the contemplative life itself that unites us to our Cistercian brothers and sisters, we remember that we are praying with them in spirit even when praying the Divine Office in our own home or work setting.

3. When we pray the Divine Office we, *“in union with the whole church, fulfill Christ’s priestly function offering to God a sacrifice of praise and making intercession for the salvation of the whole world.”* (C.19.1).

4. *“The Liturgy of the Hours is a school of continual prayer and an outstanding component of the monastic way of life”* (C.19.2). Group leaders should promote zeal for this work among Lay Cistercian members and encourage the integration of prayer with one’s daily duties.

5. In practicing the Cistercian spirit at home and at work, let us remember the **balance** to be kept between the Divine Office, Liturgy of the Eucharist, Lectio Divina, and work is essential to the Cistercian way of life. As Lay Cistercians we must also factor into our balance the needs of our family.

**C. WE DEEM PERIODS OF SILENCE AND SOLITUDE ESSENTIAL IN MAINTAINING A CONTEMPLATIVE WAY OF LIFE.**

*“Silence is counted among the principal monastic values of the Order...It opens the mind to the inspirations of the Holy Spirit and favors attentiveness of heart and solitary prayer to God... Therefore, let us be “... zealous for silence which is the guardian both of speech and of thought.”* (C.24).

1. We suggest designating a special place or room in our home as sacred to use for prayer, lectio, and silence.
2. Making the best of the opportunities God gives for silence and solitude, we *“aspire to the interior quiet in which Wisdom (Christ) is born...”* (C. 3.3). Of particular importance is the practice of watching our thoughts and not allowing thoughts to disturb our peace.
3. Let us also remember that *“the tongue holds the key to life and death,”*(Prov 18:21),as St. Benedict reminds us in (RB 6.5) of his Rule, entitled *“Restraint of Speech.”* Therefore, we hope to *“put a guard on our mouths”* and choose our words carefully *“...so that punishment for sin may be avoided.”* (RB 6.1, and 2).
4. We avoid habits of complaining, interiorly or exteriorly, for St. Benedict says: *“First and foremost there must be no word or sign of the evil of grumbling, no manifestation for any reason at all”* (RB 34.6).

5. To help deepen our silence and our faithfulness to Cistercian spirituality, each individual is encouraged to be part of one of our two annual retreats at Holy Spirit Monastery. If a person is unable to attend an annual retreat, a retreat at some Cistercian monastery is encouraged.

**D. WE INVOKE THE HOLY SPIRIT TO GUIDE US IN LECTIO DIVINA AS WE PONDER THE INSPIRED WORD OF SCRIPTURE.**

Careful *Lectio Divina* greatly strengthens our faith in God. “*This excellent monastic practice, by which God’s Word is heard and pondered, is a source of prayer and a school of contemplation, where we speak heart to heart with God*” (C.21).

1. We try to devote some time each day, at least fifteen minutes, to *Lectio Divina*.
2. Spiritual Reading supports our *Lectio Divina*; we encourage such reading especially of our Cistercian Fathers and Mothers as well as reading the Lives of the Saints. Spiritual reading often becomes a 'Lectio Divina' experience.

**E. “FOLLOWING THE EXAMPLE OF THE FATHERS OF CITEAUX WHO SOUGHT AN UNCOMPLICATED RELATIONSHIP WITH THE GOD OF SIMPLICITY, THE LIFESTYLE OF THE BROTHERS AND SISTERS IS TO BE PLAIN AND FRUGAL.” (C. 27).**

1. Without drawing any undue attention to ourselves we seek to nurture simplicity regarding material goods. Because of the needs of our families, for some Lay Cistercians this simplicity may mean simplicity of heart rather than an exterior simplicity.
2. Each person maintains integrity in his/her own situation seeking a simple lifestyle; interiorly they long to “*prefer nothing whatever to Christ.*” (RB 72.11).

**F. “WORK, ESPECIALLY MANUAL WORK, HAS ALWAYS ENJOYED SPECIAL ESTEEM IN THE CISTERCIAN TRADITION...” (C.26).**

*“Work... gives,”* the brothers and sisters, *“the opportunity of sharing in the divine work of creation and restoration and of following in the footsteps of Jesus Christ. This hard and redeeming work is a means of providing a livelihood for the monks and nuns and for other people, especially the poor. It expresses solidarity with all workers. Moreover, work is an occasion for a fruitful asceticism that fosters personal development and maturity. It promotes health of mind and body and contributes greatly to the unity of the whole community.”* (C.26).

1. We attempt to approach all work, whether at home or place of work, with an attitude of reverence and thanksgiving.
2. We make a special effort to care for the goods of our households and places of work; and to care for all work related items, clothing, office equipment or anything else that God so graciously has entrusted to us. (cf.RB 32.1).

**G. HOSPITALITY IS VERY IMPORTANT IN THE MONASTIC TRADITION. “ALL GUESTS WHO PRESENT THEMSELVES ARE TO BE WELCOMED AS CHRIST...” (RB 53.1)**

1. We try to practice Christ-like hospitality in all the situations of our daily life.
2. In our daily encounters with others we show care and concern especially for the poor *“because in them more particularly Christ is received.”* (cf.RB 53.15).

**H. IN THE RULE, HUMILITY IS ONE OF THE PILLARS OF ITS TEACHING. “WHOEVER EXALTS HIMSELF SHALL BE HUMBLED, AND WHOEVER HUMBLER HIMSELF SHALL BE EXALTED” (RB 7.1).**

1. We often read excerpts from C.7 of the Rule on the twelve steps of humility, asking God to give us the gift of a humble and contrite heart.
2. We endeavor, in the spirit of humility, to truly listen to others.

3. While acknowledging and being grateful for God's many gifts to us, we keep watch over thoughts of vainglory and pride that look down upon others.

**I. "THE FIRST STEP OF HUMILITY IS UNHESITATING OBEDIENCE WHICH COMES NATURALLY TO THOSE WHO CHERISH CHRIST ABOVE ALL." (Luke 14:11;18:14 ; RB 5.1).**

We hope to make every situation in life an opportunity to develop an obedient spirit in conformity to the saying of the Lord: *"I have not come to do my own will but the will of him who sent me"* (John 6:38, RB 5.13).

1. Furthermore, the disciples' obedience must be given gladly, for *"God loves a cheerful giver"* (2Cor 9:7;RB 5.16). We attempt to say "yes" to God in faith and joy to the many inconvenient and sometimes painful experiences of our daily life.
2. We recognize obedience as a privilege in furthering our spiritual growth which requires an intense form of listening *"with the ear of the heart."* (RB Prol.1).
3. We make our "Promise of Obedience" to the Rule of St. Benedict in order to more clearly discern the will of God.
4. Through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, our obedience is directed to our families, our work setting, our Lay Cistercian Community, and our Spiritual Fathers and Mothers.

**J. LIKE ALL CISTERCIAN COMMUNITIES, WE INVOKE MARY, ASSUMED INTO HEAVEN, AS OUR PATRONESS; EACH PERSON IS CONSECRATED TO HER IN A SPECIAL WAY.**

"Each community of the Order and all the monks and nuns are dedicated to the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother and symbol of the Church in the order of faith, love, and perfect union with Christ" (C. 3.3). *"May the Blessed Virgin Mary who was taken up into heaven, the life, sweetness, and hope of all earthly pilgrims, never be far from our hearts."* (C.22).

1. As Lay Cistercians we look to Mary to lead us in our Cistercian Way. With our Cistercian Fathers, we know that she is forming Christ in us.

2. Our Community is dedicated to Mary under the title "Our Lady of the Sacred Heart."
3. We recite the "Salve Regina" (Hail Holy Queen) every night before retiring.
4. It is suggested that we pray the Rosary daily as a special expression of our devotion to Our Lady.
5. The Feast of the Assumption, August 15<sup>th</sup>, is the patronal feast of the Cistercian Order.

**K. THE DAILY EUCHARIST HOLDS A SPECIAL PLACE OF REVERENCE IN CISTERCIAN LIFE.**

*"The Eucharist is the source and summit of the whole Christian life and of our communion in Christ...it is by sharing in the paschal mystery of the Lord that we are united more closely to one another and with the whole Church." (C.18).*

1. We attend daily Mass as often as we are able. Daily reception of the Holy Eucharist is seen as an expression of our union with Christ and with one another.
2. *"Sunday is dedicated to the mystery of the Resurrection"* (C.17.3) Especially on this day we ponder the Eucharistic mystery with joy and gratitude, sharing in the Eucharist as fully as we can and making it a day of prayer and lectio. We also apply ourselves to the needs of our family and parish.
3. All are encouraged to receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation once a month.

**L. THE LAY CISTERCIANS OF SOUTH FLORIDA LOOK UPON THEMSELVES AS A COMMUNITY AND A SCHOOL OF LOVE**

1. We seek to practice charity, compassion, and reverence for each other and are mindful, even when we are apart, that we are sharing in the special grace of Cistercian Spirituality.
2. We attend our Lay Cistercian meetings every month and other gatherings as specified.

3. As a community we desire to give ourselves to continual prayer and to maintain a “*constant mindfulness of God*” (C.20).

### **III. ORGANIZATION AND FILIATION**

#### **A. RELATIONSHIP OF SOUTH FLORIDA LAY CISTERCIANS TO THE CISTERCIAN ORDER**

At the General Chapter of 2002, Lay Cistercians on an international level presented their request for guidance from the Order; the result was a letter, authorized by the Mixed General Meeting of 2002, written to all the Lay Cistercians in the world. In part it reads: “*The values and common practices such as lectio divina, individual and liturgical prayer, simplicity of life, conversatio morum, interior silence and contemplation, work as a means of sanctification, bind you to one another and to us...Our differences are evident, yet we have the same Spirit. In respecting these differences, our unity will be able to grow on solid and lasting foundations. We don’t know what the future holds for us, but our vision of The Cistercian Family recognizes you as authentic witnesses of the Cistercian vocation fully engaged in the world. We are moved and profoundly grateful to The Spirit working in you*” (Mixed General Meeting – MGM 2002).

#### **B. INTERACTION WITH THE MONASTERY OF ONE’S OWN FILIATION**

1. We acknowledge the Lay Cistercians of Our Lady of the Holy Spirit in Conyers, Georgia, as our Motherhouse; we also acknowledge the Holy Spirit Monastery who has graciously voted, as a community, to form a bond of unity and charity with us. We look to the Lay Cistercians and the monks of Holy Spirit Monastery for example and guidance.
2. “*It is the contemplative life itself that is the Order’s way of participating in the mission of Christ and His Church and being part of the local church.*” (C.31). Therefore, we participate in this mission along with the monastic community by praying for the needs of our monastery of filiation, Our Lady of the Holy Spirit, and for all branches of the Cistercian family.

3. Visitations are made to the Lay Cistercians of South Florida at the discretion of our monastery Our Lady of the Holy Spirit.
4. Every year our Council chooses from its members a liaison who keeps in touch with Holy Spirit's Lay Cistercian liaison to us.

### **C. INTERACTION WITH OTHER LAY CISTERCIAN GROUPS**

*"The communities of the order spread all over the world are gathered into unity by a bond of charity. Through the union that results from this association, they can help one another in coming to a more complete understanding and practice of their common patrimony and they can offer mutual encouragement and support in difficulties" (C.4 §1).*

1. Our Lay Cistercian group joins with the other Lay Cistercian groups in this bond of charity formally accepted at the 2002 International Lay Cistercian meeting. We also wish to offer to each other mutual encouragement and support as well as to receive advice and to learn from the experience of others as we share the understanding of our common patrimony.
2. *"The communities of the Order are grouped in Regions approved by the General Chapter. These regional conferences foster communion and fraternal cooperation within each geographical area and in the Order as a whole" (C81).* The Lay Cistercians of South Florida attend their Lay Cistercian meetings held throughout the United States to maintain a sense of common goals and a unity in the Holy Spirit in the spirit of the Order's "Charter of Charity."

### **D. INTERACTION WITH OUR FAMILY MEMBERS AND OUR LAY CISTERCIAN GROUP MEMBERS**

*Lay Cistercians seek to live the Cistercian charism in the world by making their own family and Lay Cistercian group setting a "community of love" where "all are to be welcomed as Christ" (RB 53.1). Remembering the Lord's command "you shall love your neighbor as yourself" (RB 4.1).*

We serve Christ in our own family, our neighbors and Lay Cistercian members. We must have our spouse's permission to become a Lay Cistercian at the time of making a first Promise. We are careful that our practices are done in such a way that others in our family experience our

love and care. We bear each other's infirmities with patience. We “*support by prayer and other appropriate means those who are weak, troubled or unwell. The sick, the aged and the dying are to be surrounded with a care that is attentive and affectionate*” (C.13§2).

#### **IV. LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE**

##### **A. THE COUNCIL**

The will of God is to be discerned in all matters of importance through prayer, thoughtful discussion and an objective view of the situation. The leadership and governance of the Lay Cistercians is a service rendered by the Council, made up of a minimum of three and a maximum of five members – these Council members must have already made their third year of Promises. The Council discusses all matters brought to its attention and presents those deemed important enough to the whole community. Unless exceptional circumstances are deemed warranted by two-thirds of the Council, votes may not be cast by proxy. Matters voted upon shall be decided by a majority of the vote.

When choosing persons for positions of leadership within our group, we follow St. Benedict's advice: “*Goodness of life and wisdom in teaching must be the criteria ... even if he is last in community rank*” (RB 64.2).

Council elections take place in September, and the new Council member starts on the first of the month of the next monthly meeting. When we have three members, our cycle of elections will be to elect one member per year. When we have five members, our cycle of elections will be to elect two members the first year, two members the second year and one member the third year. The Council members are elected for a three year term. Council members may not be re-elected back to back; however, they may be re-elected after a three year absence from the Council.

Council members will be elected by a majority vote (50 percent+1) by the members of the Lay Cistercian community present who already have made at least one Promise. We cannot vote or nominate by proxy. Voting will take place by secret ballot.

Observers, novices, inactive and auxiliary members have no voting status and may not be elected to a Council position.

At the voting process each member eligible to vote receives a ballot listing those candidates eligible to become a member of the Council. The candidate with the highest number of votes over and above the required majority vote will be selected to serve for the next three years. A separate vote will be taken for each candidate. If someone must resign with good reason during his/her term, another election will then take place. The person elected to take the place of the one who resigned will finish out the term. If the term remaining is a year or less the person may be re-elected at the end of the current term.

## **B. RESPONSIBILITIES OF OFFICIALS**

1. **The Observer Coordinators** are members who have made three years of Promises and are appointed by the Council to:
  - a. Maintain an open line of communication with interested and current observers.
  - b. Maintain an updated file of the Observers, including names, addresses and telephone numbers. Keep monthly records of all persons attending observer meetings and when they leave or are received into Formation.
  - c. Notify the Council of any issue that may require consideration.
  - d. Hold five meetings a year and give appropriate make up assignments.
  
2. **Formation Directors** for Year I/ Year II and the Juniorate are chosen by the Council.
  - a. The Formation Directors take their respective groups for monthly classes. The Agenda(s) is approved by the Council. The Directors share any difficulties with the Council who may seek advice from the designated representative of the monastery. It is important to remember that the Directors are not spiritual directors, but teachers of lived experience.
  - b. The Director(s) is assigned each year. The initial class begins at the meeting following the Spring retreat at Holy Spirit Monastery. At the conclusion of the year the Director(s) shall

certify to the Council their students who have satisfactorily completed the course of studies for the year and have demonstrated a level of knowledge of the subject matter sufficient to warrant the making of Promises and/or continuation to the next step of formation.

- c. Each Director chooses an assistant with the approval of the Council. This Assistant Director attends the classes; respectfully gives his or her input and conducts the class if the Formation Director is unable to attend. Other members may be invited to participate.

3. **The Recording Secretary** - chosen by the Council

- a. Has custody of and maintains all the organizations corporate records, except financial records.
- b. Takes minutes at Council meetings and monthly gatherings.
- c. Keeps a record of attendance for formation meetings, notes significant events such as members/dates when received into formation, members/dates of Promises, member/dates of visitation, and other significant events.

4. **The Treasurer** – chosen by Council

- a. Has custody of and maintains the organization's financial records, keeping full and accurate records of all financial transactions.
- b. Collects monthly contributions and allocates agreed funds to International Fund and Holy Spirit Monastery.
- c. Makes payments to facilities for meetings, etc.
- d. Reimburses members for expenditures (printing, postage, books, etc.).

5. **Liturgy Coordinator** – chosen by Council
  - a. Provides liturgy for the group and coordinates liturgy at monthly meetings.
  - b. Forms and maintains Schola and choir.
  
6. **Librarian** – chosen by Council
  - a. Maintains and supervises the use of the library.
  - b. Orders/suggests ordering Cistercian spirituality books that would enhance the library working with Council.
  
7. **Cistercian Newsletter Distributor** – chosen by Council
  - a. Produces and sends out monthly newsletter.
  - b. Members should submit any contributions by mail or email in a PDF format by the 15th of the month prior to publication which is usually the first of the month.
  
8. **Guest Mistress/Master (Bell ringer)**
  - a. Keeps meeting flowing on time per agenda.
  - b. Coordinates general organization of the monthly meeting.
  - c. Rings the bell three to five minutes prior to Lauds and prior to the afternoon session.
  - d. At the discretion of the bell ringer, the bell is rung when a person goes over his or her two to three minute time limit.
  - e. Reminds us to say prayers for particular intentions, including the monks of the Holy Spirit Monastery, the sick, and the parishioners of our host parish.

The lengths of term of these responsibilities are discerned on an individual basis by the Council. Most will be a term of two years according to the wishes

of the person taking on the responsibility. If anyone wishes to be relieved of a responsibility, he/she notifies the Council

## **V. FORMATION**

*“Formation to Cistercian life has for its purpose the restoration of the Divine likeness in the brothers and sisters through the workings of the Holy Spirit. Aided by the maternal care of the Mother of God, the brothers and sisters so to advance in the monastic life that they progressively attain the full measure of the stature of Christ.” (C.45 §1)*

### **A. FORMATION/EDUCATION PROGRAM**

1. The South Florida Lay Cistercians follow the five-year Education Program formulated by Our Lady of the Holy Spirit Monastery Lay Cistercian Affiliates.
2. We heed the precepts of the Rule by *“arranging everything so that the strong have something to yearn for and the weak nothing to run from”* (RB 64.19).

### **B. FORMATION PROCESS**

**Guests:** Those interested in learning more about our Lay Cistercian charism are welcome to join us at our monthly meeting for morning prayer, conference, sext, and lunch. They may do this for three meetings over the course of a period of no longer than six months. During this time, we encourage them to speak with the members about our community. We offer them copies of our Statutes and Formation documents to read during the course of a meeting and return that day. If they feel called to explore our charism further, they may submit a written request to the Council to begin the Observership when next offered describing why they feel called to our Lay Cistercian community. The Council will meet with them and subsequently present their request to the community for their vote. A member will be assigned to them by the community to maintain contact with them until Observership classes begin. They are encouraged to attend a retreat at Holy Spirit Monastery in the interim.

**1. Observership** - Each Observer will be interviewed by the the Council. They will attend approximately five educational meetings apart from the monthly community meeting. They will attend the Spring retreat at Holy Spirit Monastery.

The five sessions cover the following topics:

- Founding of Citeaux
- Lives of Founders: Robert, Alberic and Stephen
- Cistercian Evangelists: Bernard, William of St. Thierry,
- Gueric of Igny, Ælred of Rievaulx
- Rule of St. Benedict
- Cistercian values (Lectio, Liturgy) from Constitutions, Guidelines
- History of Lay Cistercians.

The purpose of the Observer classes is to introduce Cistercian spirituality, to begin the development of a more contemplative dimension, and to give basic information so that the person, together with the observer coordinator, may discern if God is calling him/her to this spirituality. Each observer is encouraged to meet privately with the Council throughout the observer process. If the Council then approves, the observer may proceed to the Formation Program.

When the Observer enters Formation, a short ceremony is held. This is not a "Promise," however, it is encouraged that it take place at the Monastery of the Holy Spirit. The Rule of Saint Benedict and the Life of Saint Benedict are presented to the new novice.

**2. Year I/Year II Formation** – This is a two year sequential program, requiring monthly attendance. A Novice Formation Director is assigned by the Council. Upon beginning the Novitiate, a "Guardian Angel" will be assigned to each novice to follow them throughout their formation. This person is a professed senior member of the lay community who supports the novice until their final promise.

- a. "The Cistercian Way" by Andre Louf
- b. Second Year Novice: "*The Rule of Benedict*"

The objective of these courses is to deepen the understanding of Cistercian spirituality and the Rule of Saint Benedict.

Attendance is extremely important. It shows commitment to formation in the charism of Cistercian spirituality and stability in the community. A novice must ask the Formation Director for a makeup assignment for any missed meeting. The number of missed meetings permitted depends upon the individual circumstances. The Formation Director will recommend to the Council whether they believe that the novice is prepared to continue in formation or repeat the year.

After the two year formation process, the Lay Cistercian is ready to make a simple Promise that is binding for one year and renewable annually.

3. **Juniorate** – This is a three year non-sequential program

Junior 1: “*Monastic Practices*” by Fr. Charles Cummings

Junior 2: Foundational Texts:  
*Charter of Charity*  
*Exordium Parvum*  
*Exordium Cistercii*

Junior 3: Cistercians Fathers and Mothers

- a. After three simple Promises, the Lay Cistercian should request in writing the approval of the Council for the making of the lifetime Promise. The lifetime Promise is our goal.
- b. A Lay Cistercian unable to make a lifetime promise after the three one-year promises should request in writing the approval of the Council for the making of such additional one-year Promises as may be recommended as appropriate by the Council keeping in mind the goal of stability and commitment given with the lifetime Promise.
- c. All Promises are made at our “Spring” retreat at Holy Spirit Monastery. If an aspirant is unable go to Holy Spirit Monastery, they make their Promise at the next Formation meeting held in Florida upon approval of the Council. The Council’s approval of making Promises at a Formation meeting is not to be freely given and will be given only under the most compelling circumstances. Other arrangements for Promises at the Monastery are possible. We must be mindful that Our Lady of the Holy Spirit is our Motherhouse and we are bound by a bond of unity and charity.

4. **Seniors** -- Are those who have made Lifetime Promises. They participate in ongoing educational study groups. Topics/books for discussion are chosen by the Professed senior community.
5. **Inactive members** -- are those who have completed the Observership program and some of the Formation meetings but because of various personal reasons are unable to attend monthly meetings and formation classes. The importance of attendance at formation classes cannot be underestimated. These classes are foundational for development of the Lay Cistercian spirituality.

These members will still remain part of the group and may attend monthly morning meetings, but they lose their right to vote and to hold any positions of responsibility. They may participate fully in all

discussions. They may not make Promises until they are able to attend formation meetings regularly. They will write to the Council addressing their reason for which they are unable to maintain attendance at meetings. The Council will meet with them for discernment. They may petition the Council to return to formation when their personal circumstances permit. If approved, they will start over with the formation class they were unable to complete as the class is available. We value their presence and encourage them to continue to live their lives according to the Lay Cistercian charism.

6. **Auxiliary members** -- are those who have made three Promises, even Lifetime Promises, who wish to maintain their membership and are unable to attend monthly meetings. The reasons may be due to personal health, or that of a close family member, geographical distance due to relocation, etc.

The Lay Cistercian will write to the Council and community as to their reason for this request to change to auxiliary status. We keep in touch, including through our monthly minutes and newsletters. They are welcomed at meetings when able although they will not have voting rights or hold positions of responsibility. These contacts with the Auxiliary members are an important priority to us. We encourage them to continue to live their lives according to the Lay Cistercian charism.

It is the responsibility of the Lay Cistercian to contact the community annually with the request to continue their auxiliary status or withdraw from the community. If the Auxiliary member's circumstances change, and they are able to return to inactive or active status, they are welcome to petition the Council to do so.

**There will be an annual Council review of member status each January.**

## **VI. STATUTE CHANGES**

Changes in the Statutes will be made by discussion and approval by the Council. The Council will advise the monthly Gathering of its actions. If there is a major conflict as a result of a council decision changing a statute, a majority vote by a quorum (50 percent +1) of the eligible members of the Lay Cistercian community will be taken.

## **VII. DEATH OF A LAY CISTERCIAN**

When a Lay Cistercian dies all members who are able will attend the funeral mass as a group and a perpetual mass enrollment card from the Abbey of Our Lady of the Holy Spirit will be given. When a member of a Lay Cistercian family dies, all members are notified. We keep a mindfulness of prayer both for the deceased lay cistercian and for the family member(s). We recite the traditional Seven Penitential Psalms (psalms 6, 32, 38, 51, 102, 130, 143) or seven Our Fathers or Psalm 50 seven times for the deceased.

## **CLOSING STATEMENT**

*“Fidelity to the monastic way of life is closely related to zeal for the Kingdom of God and for the salvation of the whole human race. Monks bear this apostolic concern in their hearts. It is the contemplative life itself that is their way of participating in the mission of Christ and his Church and of being part of the local church...” (C.31)*

South Florida Lay Cistercians share this same zeal for the kingdom of God and the salvation of all by deepening their contemplative life. Drawing strength and guidance from their commitment promise, following the Rule of St. Benedict

and Cistercian spirituality, they seek to bring Cistercian life into their ministries, family life, and concerns.