



## DIRECTORY OF THE REGULAR VISITATION IN THE CISTERCIAN ORDER

(Text approved by the 2022 General Chapter)

### Foreword :

- Already present in the *Carta caritatis prior*, the institution of regular visitation is one of the central points in the life of our Order. It is an effective means of serving both the spiritual dynamism of communities and the pastoral action of superiors. It can even allow for a better communion between the different communities of the Order.

- For monasteries that are part of a congregation, it is the responsibility of the Abbot President and the chapter of the congregation to make every effort to ensure that the regular visitation is fruitful.

- The Constitutions of the Order, of each Congregation or of the monasteries not forming part of a Congregation, as well as the Declaration on the principal elements of Cistercian life, already provide a framework for the practice of regular visitation.

### 1) The person of the visitators :

1,1) The Constitutions, both of the Order and of each Congregation, as well as of the monasteries which do not depend on a Congregation, establish who is the ordinary visitator of each monastery.

1,2) The ordinary visitator of each monastery should be accompanied by a co-visitator or a female co-visitator (a major superior or a former major superior, even if they are not part of our order ). In the case of monasteries of nuns, according to the Instruction *Cor Orans*, there should be a female co-visitator, in the case of a monastery of monks a co-visitor or a female co-visitator. The superior who receives the visitation, after consultation with the community, will choose the co-visitor or female co-visitator in agreement with the visitator.

In congregations where the ordinary Visitator must periodically delegate the regular visitation, it is important, in order to ensure continuity in the accompaniment of the community, that the co-visitator of this delegated visitation is the one from the previous visitation.

1.3) If the visitator does not have sufficient knowledge of the language of the community visited, he should choose an interpreter who will be bound by professional secrecy and will not belong to that community, nor should he or she be the co-visitator. After consultation with the community, he may even delegate a superior of our Order who speaks the language of the community.

## 2) Preparation for the visitation :

2.1) The Visitor must announce the date of the regular visitation at least two months before the visitation begins.

2.2) For the preparation of the visitation, the community should meet to discern in dialogue what its situation is and what questions and difficulties it would like to submit to the visitors<sup>1</sup>. These should be sent to the visitors in advance. This discernment should focus on the most important aspects of community life:

2.2.1 Balance of monastic life between prayer, work, lectio, relaxation. Is the schedule adapted to the reality of the present community?

2.2.2 Liturgical life: form and execution of the liturgy

2.2.3 Economy, work and sustainable development

2.2.4 Pastoral office of the superior, the service of leaders and collaborators, the functioning of councils and the chapter

2.2.5 Relationships in the community with superiors, brothers or sisters. Community atmosphere, culture of dialogue, circulation of information.

2.2.6 Vocation ministry, initial and ongoing formation, integration of young people.

2.2.7 care for the physical and psychological health of each member of the community. Care for the elderly and the sick.

2.2.8 Monastery and relations with the world (enclosure, hospitality, means of communication...).

2.2.9 The future of the community and decisions to be taken to ensure this future.

2.2.10 Relations with the Order and with the local Church.

2.3) The superior and those responsible for the economy have the obligation, according to the requirements of each's proper Congregation, to prepare a report on the financial state of the monastery in order that the financial situation is clearly seen. For monasteries directly incorporated into the Order, the Abbot General with his Council will establish this requirement.

## 3) Conduct of the visitation :

3.1) The Visitors should cultivate a climate of trust and mutual esteem that encourages everyone to participate and listen. They must dedicate sufficient time to the regular visitation. The regular visitation to a monastery *sui iuris* also implies a visit to its dependent houses, which should be carried out, if possible, at the same time.

3.2) Opening of visitation:

All members of the community (even those who legitimately reside outside the community) should endeavour to be present at the opening of the regular visitation in which the visitors highlight the importance of this event. The visitors should make every effort to reach out by modern means of communication to those members who are absent from the monastery at the time of the visit.

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<sup>1</sup> The word visitor in the plural refers to the ordinary visitor as well as his or her co-visitor.

3.3) All members of the visited community have the right and duty to have a conversation with the visitators. Furthermore, they have the duty to answer their questions in a spirit of truth and openness. They will consider that the visitators are neither legislators nor reformers, but that the regular visitation invites them to a self-examination of the community (Declaration of the General Chapter on Cistercian life n° 117). Indeed, only the community is the subject of its own conversion. In this spirit, they will not consider it necessary to mention individual minor faults of their brothers or sisters.

3.4) The Co-visitator and the female Co-visitator take part in the whole process of the visitation, including the personal interviews.

3.5) The evaluation of the economy/finances of the monastery and its enterprises is an integral part of the visitation. The Visitators will take care that the community's real estate assets and artistic heritage is preserved.

3.6) Conclusion of the visitation :

3.6.1 The visitators communicate the result of the visit to the superior, propose the appropriate or necessary measures to be taken, and welcome the opinion of the superior. They should also meet with the council.

3.6.2 The visitators will draw up a visitation charter on the spot in which they will summarise their perception of the reality of the community and give their advice, encouragement and any necessary prescriptions. It will be submitted to the superior for possible modifications before being read to the community.

3.6.3 The first task of the visitators is to help the superior of the visited monastery in his pastoral function. They should do this both by the advice and encouragement given in the visitation charter and by their dialogue with the superior. If they have to make important decisions, the visitators should do so only after having discussed them with the superior and, if possible, with the whole community. If they find that for serious reasons the good of the community requires a change of superior, the visitators can invite the superior to resign. If the superior does not resign, they will inform the competent authorities of the Order, according to the proper law of our Order. For serious reasons, with the agreement of the superior, they may indicate in the visitation charter that the person in charge of a job or an officer should be relieved of his or her office so that the superior may act accordingly.

3.6.4 The visitation concludes with the reading of the visitation charter to the whole community. The visitators will comment on it. This is distributed to all the professed and after a time of reflection, the visitators will lead a dialogue with the community on this document.

3.6.5 The Visitators should be concerned to remind the community of the purpose of religious life, which is growth towards full maturity in Christ. They should also remind the community of its right, according to the proper law of the Order, to appeal to the competent person in case of abuse of power.

#### **4) After the Visitation :**

4.1) The superior and the community will take the use of the visitation charter to heart as an instrument for the conversion of the community and apply its prescriptions. To this end, it should be read in community at least twice a year.

4.2) After one year, the visitation charter will be shared in community. It will also be used for reflection when preparing the next visit.

4.3) The visitators will make arrangements to ensure that this process is followed up between each visit. For this purpose, a fraternal visit by one of them could be useful.

4.4) The regular visitation requires great discretion in order to help maintain trust and mutual esteem. The superior, the community visited and the visitators are bound by the duty of confidentiality in particular regarding the text of the visitation charter and with respect to the visitators who because of the nature of their office often cannot defend themselves. For monasteries which are part of a congregation, the report of the Abbot President<sup>2</sup> to the chapter of the congregation should provide an update of the state of the regular visitations in the congregation so that it can be the place where they are evaluated. If some congregations have the practice of a house report this should also present the follow-up of the regular visitation.

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<sup>2</sup> It is the responsibility of the Abbot President to protect and promote life in the monastery according to the constitutions of his congregation (art 37 of the Constitutions of the Order).