



Ratio Institutionis of the Cistercian Order

(Testo approvato dal Capitolo Generale 2022)

1. The Cistercian vocation

1. We entered the monastery to follow Christ in a community of brothers or sisters on the path of the Cistercian vocation . Through a life in union with God and through the apostolate of prayer, listening, companionship and other apostolic tasks and events, we want to serve the Church and the growth of the kingdom of God.
2. Saint Benedict and our Fathers emphasized that monastic life has the character of an integral formation. This is why monasteries were called schools of service to the Lord (RB Prologue 45) and schools of charity (Bernhard von Clairvaux, Sermo de diversis 121).
3. The formative elements of our school of life are the daily common and personal prayer, the practice of lectio divina, the various works and life in the community.
4. The role of superior , who is usually elected for a longer period in our order, also creates stability. It is up to him to coordinate well the individual areas of work and at the same time to ensure good human and spiritual formation and to accompany the members in all phases of life.
5. Religious life takes each member and the whole community through ups and downs, through good times and hard times, which are equally important for human and spiritual maturation. So, stability is not only an important pillar of the Benedictine-Cistercian vocation as a vow, but also the basis for the fruitfulness of this life consecrated to God.
6. Our Cistercian fathers and mothers point out in their writings that not only theoretical knowledge but experience also is fundamental to our formation ¹. This experience is acquired in daily practice over the years and makes our life and witness authentic.
7. Everything said in this ratio for the monks applies equally to the sisters, except as regards provisions pertaining to the priesthood.

2. Initial formation

8. The monastic formation begins as soon as the aspirant becomes familiar with monastic life. It is not primarily about imparting knowledge, but about practicing a new way of life that is characterized by listening to God's Word and responding personally to it in prayer, work and community life.
9. Therefore the whole monastic community is involved in the formation of its members and bears responsibility for it. Through example, intercessory prayer, accompaniment and dialogue, all members should bear witness to the richness of monastic life and introduce the new member to this lifestyle.

¹ cf., for example, Bernard of Clairvaux, Sermo de Canticis Canticorum 1.9 ; 3.1 et al .

10. In our time of globalization, vocations from other countries also come to our monasteries. Any monastery that welcomes such persons must carefully assess whether they are actually fit for monastic life in our culture and provide them with all the spiritual and human help necessary for proper integration. Under no circumstances should people from other cultures be used as mere stopgap in order to extend the life of a monastery.

2.1 Candidacy or Postulancy

11. After a shorter or longer period of the aspirancy, in which the prospective candidate gets to know the monastery and his aptitude is evaluated for Cistercian religious life by the abbot and/or master of novices, the first introduction to a monastic way of life takes place through living in the community during the postulancy. This growth in the community is also the main task of this phase of formation. In this phase, the vocation is to be proven and strengthened.
12. Gaps in the knowledge of the faith and in Christian practice should also be addressed and informed during this phase. Many young people of our time experience in the monastery for the first time a structured and orderly life. It takes time to live it. Where the human maturity and mental health of a candidate are hampered by injuries, interior healing should be worked toward through close accompaniment and if necessary, professional help should be sought.
13. The conditions for admission to the postulancy are certificates of baptism (a certificate of confirmation is necessary for the novitiate), and according to the law of each country, a medical certificate, and if necessary, a psychological test. The candidates should furnish a written declaration that they are not prevented by any financial or moral obligations to embark on this new phase of his life. Accounting for the different conditions of each country, a resume of academic and professional work may be necessary for admission to the postulancy.
14. The duration of the postulancy will be determined in the Constitutions of the Congregations or in the Monasteries directly incorporated into the Order.

2.2 The Novitiate

15. The novitiate is the time of intensive theoretical and practical formation in Cistercian life. It must be completed in a monastery authorized to conduct a novitiate, that means a juridically independent monastery or a monastery which has received the right to be a formation center from the appropriate congregational or general chapter.
16. During the novitiate, the novice is encouraged to grow in a new form of life. To this end, he should be educated on how to live in relation to the external world and how to use means of communication according to a new way of life.
17. Under the direction of the novice master, the novice is formed in Cistercian life in prayer, work, spiritual reading, the communal life and is accompanied closely by the novice master through classes and regular personal conversations. It is by these means that his vocation should be proven and develop.

2.2.1 Initial formation in the novitiate

18. The primary formation in the novitiate is the initiation into liturgical prayer, personal prayer and meditation, personal and communal meditation of Sacred Scripture, the practice of lectio divina and participation in the life of the community, with all the enriching and challenging elements this entails.
19. Furthermore, it is fundamental for the novitiate that the novice is introduced to the specific way in which the Rule of Benedict is lived in his own monastery. He should also get to know the constitutions of the Congregations or of the monastery, the Declaration of the General Chapter of the Cistercian Order and the history of the monastery

20. In the same way, the novice should get to know and fulfill the various services in the house, performs them in a culture of dialogue thanks to the classes and community life.
21. During this accompanied process, the novice's self-knowledge grows, and through the experience of failure and grace he deepens his personal relationship with Christ and the integration of faith into his personal life.
22. He should also get to know the areas of activity of the monastery through apprenticeships and/or collaborations.
23. Since our Order, from its foundation, is under the special protection of Our Lady, archetype and model of consecrated life, the new member should be helped to live an authentic Marian devotion.
24. This primary formation, described in 18 to 22, should take place in one's own monastery.

2.2.2 Other compulsory subjects in the novitiate

25. The (other) compulsory subjects in the novitiate, which may be taken through study courses outside the monastery or at the monastic course in Rome, are the following:
 - Introduction to the mystery of Christ, the sacraments and the most important truths of faith;
 - The vows in theory and practice, spiritually and psychologically;
 - Introduction to the Holy Scriptures, especially the Psalms;
 - Introduction to the liturgy;
 - Theology of spiritual life (ascetics and mysticism);
 - History and Spirituality of Monasticism and our Order;
 - Our Cistercian fathers and mothers and their spirituality;
 - Liturgical chant
 - Introduction to Christian Anthropology
26. A theological correspondence course with the corresponding study weeks can be helpful to acquire a deeper knowledge of the faith .
27. A basic formation in psychology and pedagogy is very valuable, because it can help in a person's spiritual life and in the life of the community.

2.2.3 Duration and organization of the novitiate

28. The duration of the novitiate will be determined in the Constitutions of the Congregations or by the Monasteries directly incorporated into the Order, but it can never be less than one year.
29. During the canonical year of novitiate, 5 hours of instruction per week are obligatory and an additional 5 hours of personal study, deepening knowledge or preparation for class.
30. The formation is continued daily in the second year of the novitiate, where it is required. In this phase, more supervised self-study, the completion of courses or preparation for later theology studies (e.g. learning Latin and Greek) can be scheduled.
31. If a monastery itself is not able to provide satisfactorily with the teaching of all the compulsory subjects, it is obliged to allow the novices, after the first year of the novitiate, to attend the one-month monastic course in Rome for three years, and to ensure that that the novices also do the final diploma of the monastic course.
32. The necessity of this supplementary formation, which brings the young monks and sisters into contact with other young Cistercians from all over the world, should be considered in each monastery in discussion with the Father Immediate or the Abbot President.

2.3 Temporary profession

33. The duration of temporary profession in our Order is at least 3 years. It can be successively extended, but it should go beyond what is established in canon law for initial formation. The profession must be renewed each time after the 3 years. The exact duration will be established in the Constitutions of the Congregations or Monasteries directly incorporated into the Order.
34. At this stage, the young monk leads the monastic life in an autonomous manner and is gradually introduced to taking on responsibility. He is accompanied spiritually and personally by the master of novices or the person responsible for the juniorate .
35. During this phase, formation continues. During this phase, it is possible to have recourse to accompanied personal study, to advanced courses in some subjects or to preparation for subsequent studies in theology (for example by learning Latin and Greek).
36. In addition, he should acquire the necessary professional knowledge in order to be able to carry out his work in the monastery responsibly.
37. The temporary professed participates more and more in the life and dialogue of the community, in order to get to know his brothers better and also to give them the opportunity to get to know him better.
38. Participation in the monastic course in Rome is very useful because it is an enrichment in the formation of the young monks even though it is not obligatory.
39. If a theology degree is to be completed in this phase, the young monk should, if possible, live in a monastic environment. Should this not be possible, at least one year should be inserted before making solemn profession, during which he will again live in the monastery and be accompanied by the superiors.
40. According to their level of study, monks and nuns can do their theological studies or a diploma in monastic theology at Sant'Anselmo, of which the Monastic Formation Course constitutes the first year of a monastic licentiate.
41. When preparing monks for priestly ordination, the prescriptions of canon law and the bishops' conference of the country concerned must followed in this regard.

2.4 Formators

42. In addition to the responsibility of all members of a monastery for the formation of the young monks, the novice master is primarily responsible for the formation and teaching. They carry out this training in consultation and in cooperation with the Abbot . They may be assisted by other competent monks.
43. Since the majority of monasteries do not have but a few monks in formation, it can be helpful if a few suitable solemnly professed monks together with the master of novices (and possibly his assistant) form a novitiate community in which the young monk feels at home.
44. In every monastery, the topic of abuse should be treated under the guidance of experts who understand monastic life and a document of protection should be drawn up, if the respective Bishops' Conferences so requests it. The abbot, the novice master and those in charge of the like should be sensitive to this topic and stay up to date with adequate training.
45. The purpose of monastic formation is the growth of a mature personality in Christ. Therefore no one should be obliged to manifest their conscience to a superior or be manipulated in the choice of their vocation so that he can live his life in Christian freedom and dignity. The distinction between external and internal forum must always be respected.
46. Freedom to choose a confessor and, if necessary, a spiritual director is to be preserved. Care should be taken that these persons respect our spirituality and vocation (cf. CIC can. 630).

2.5 Cooperation in formation

47. Where it is possible and useful, suitable formators from the same linguistic region, who do not necessarily have to belong to the Order, may participate in formation in our monasteries through writings, video presentations, study days, courses or similar events.
48. Modern media can be of great use in this regard.
49. A secretariat for formation at the level of the Order is to be created in the Cistercian Order, to which at least three different members of the Order from different language regions belong and is directed by one member. The members are appointed by the Abbot General's Council.

These should do their best to coordinate the formation and advanced instruction in their language regions, cultivate intense cooperation with the Cistercians of the Strict Observance and the Benedictines with regard to formation, make existing documents available online and, if necessary, organize inter-monastery events in person or online.

3. Ongoing formation

50. The formation of a monk does not end with his solemn profession. Just as we are on the road following Christ our whole life, we must also continue to educate ourselves in theory and in practice and orientate ourselves to the challenges and demands of each stage of life.
51. That is why regular periodic ongoing formation is essential. It includes both events in the monastery, in which as many members as possible should take part, as well as opportunities for ongoing formation for the individual.
52. One week of common ongoing formation per year can serve as a guideline, but this week can of course also be divided into individual study days, lectures, weekends, etc.
53. The members should not only regularly educate themselves on a professional level in order to guarantee a good quality of their work, but also on a spiritual and human level. Each member should be allowed to have approximately one week of ongoing formation courses per year, however different levels of talent and need as well as the demands of each phase of life should be taken into account.
54. Topics of ongoing formation can be: theology in various forms, vocal training and sacred music, liturgy, psychology and pedagogy, art, literature, current and historical topics depending on the historical situation of each monastery, etc. Modern media can also be used for further education.
55. Online ongoing formation offerings at the level of the Order should be offered regularly.
56. Places for ongoing formation are also the annual retreats, lectio divina, table reading and the chapter discourses of the abbots and abbesses, the circular letters of the Abbot General, as well as communal reading the Holy Scriptures and the Rule of Benedict or texts by Cistercian authors.
57. The monks should be able to receive solid spiritual guidance so that they can grow throughout their lives in their personal spiritual life and in their relationship with Christ. To deepen the contemplative life, participation in contemplative retreats and similar events can also be helpful.
58. In addition to the ongoing formation of the individual, the community as a whole should work on growth in mutual love, in cooperation and tolerance as well as in the practice of communication, possibly under the guidance of experts.
59. The holistic nature of ongoing formation is important. It should include the spiritual and human dimension which includes the body, responsible care and maintenance of health.

Therefore, the monks and nuns should be given the opportunity to exercise and do sports in an appropriate way.

4. The goal of formation

60. The goal of formation in the Order is the same as the goal of the whole monastic life: that the monks and nuns make spiritual and human progress in theory and in practical life and to accompany their development, so that they gradually, with an enlarged heart, become transformed in the image of Christ and united with him. May he lead us all together to eternal life (RB 72:11).