

REGIONAL MAILBAG

USA - 2008

Number 287

JANUARY - FEBRUARY - MARCH - APRIL - 2008

A G E N D A

USA REGIONAL MEETING
JUNE 4TH - 11TH 2008
ST BENEDICT'S MONASTERY
SNOWMASS, COLORADO USA

1) House Reports

Each Superior

Discussion will follow each house report. After all the house reports are read, an *ad hoc* committee will draw up a **Regional Report** (see *Minutes of Central Commissions Meeting*, Cardeña, June 19-28, 2007, p. 43, #2 and p.46, #4 & 5). Once this **Report** is drafted we will discuss it and eventually vote to accept it.

2) Formation Secretary of the Order

S Pamela Clinton

3) Formation Secretary of the US Region

B Anthony Weber

4) Cistercian Publications

D Brendan Freeman
D Peter McCarthy

5) Structures of the Order

D Timothy Kelly

The Central Commissions Meeting at Cardeña took the following Vote, #28: "We would like reflection on the *Structures of the Order* to be continued in the Regions." We already had a discussion on this topic at our Regional Meeting at Gethsemani. For preparation, read *Minutes of the US Regional Meeting, Gethsemani Abbey, March 14-21, p. 18-23 and Appendix 2 p. 64-69.*

6) The Role of the Abbot and Abbess

M Marion Rissetto

7) Cistercian Studies Quarterly

Update and Discussion

8) Monastic Business Association (MBA)

D Timothy Kelly

Update / Questions for Discussion

AGENDA - USA REGIONAL MEETING - 2008 (continued)

9) Other Topics – Preparation for MGM

D John Denberger

Election of the Abbot General (Interpretation of Cst 83.1)

(see Law Commission Minutes, p.22-29).

- a. Juridical Link between a House of Nuns and its Foundation
- b. This will be treated by ‘ordinary procedure’ (see *CC Minutes, p. 24-25*).
- c. Panel – M Marion Rissetto, M Miriam Pollard, M Nettie Gamble

10) Cst. 81: Regional Conferences

D Thomas Davis

The Central Commissions Meeting at Cardeña took the following Vote, #37: “We would like a reflection by the MGM on Cst. 81 concerning the Regions” (see *CC Minutes, p.19-21*). This topic will be treated by ‘extraordinary procedure.’

Invited: D Timothy Kelly / Rome; D Bede Stockill / Calvaire, President of the Canadian Region;
D Jean-Marc Chéné, Abbot of Bellefontaine

Regional Delegates to the 2008 MGM: S Elizabeth LaSalle / Wrentham, F Timothy Scott / Spencer

Secretary: S Kathleen O’Neill of Mississippi

Documentation needed:

Minutes of the Central Commissions Meeting at Cardeña, June 19-28, 2007

Minutes of the US Region Meeting at Gethsemani, March 14-21, 2007

Minutes of the Law Commission Meeting at Rome, January 8-11, 2008

General Booklet for the MGM

House Reports

Please forward a copy of your House Report to me by mid-May. That way we can put all our House Reports into a booklet form in time for the Regional Meeting.

NOTE

The ‘General Booklet’ for the MGM will include working papers on the following topics:

- 1) Structures of the Order
- 2) The Role of the Abbot and Abbess
- 3) Election of the Abbot General
- 4) Juridical Link between a House of Nuns and its Foundation
- 5) Regional Conferences

M Kathy DeVico / Redwoods
President / USA Region

ANNUAL RETREAT AT HOLY TRINITY

Our annual retreat was presented by F Valerian Odermann, OSB, of Assumption Abbey, Richardton ND. He asked the lifelong monastic question, whether a monk truly seeks God. It's a matter of cultivated curiosity, a drive to go further, never satisfied with the *status quo*; our vow of *conversatio morum*, the persevering active search for God.

Your prayer tells you who you are, what kind of person you are. It's your spiritual DNA. True prayer places us in recognition and awe of the goodness that we seek.

We are like God as givers of life, engaged in an on-going process of building people up. In the *Rule* the first thing you do with the persons who come into your life is to treat them as guests and bless them, and we thereby become a praise-people.

It's easier to tear down, and complaining is internal terrorism. Choose how to behave, not on the basis of how you feel, but according to the three O's: *Opus Dei*, *Obedientia*, and *Opprobria* (it's going to be difficult).

The foundation of prayer is thanksgiving. On Thanksgiving Day all you have to do is show up and eat, but gratefulness is the real thanksgiving. I have received gifts, undeservedly, and I acknowledge them and the Giver. Thanksgiving prayer grounds us in our own humanity, with humility, humor, humus (dirt), down-to earth.

God does not sit still and neither can we, as we respond to gifts received by becoming healers for one another, and in ways we don't always know. Our gifts are for others.

There's a difference between being enrolled, even compliant to monastic practices, and being committed. We are obliged to become thanksgiving people, and for each other. This is our prayer of responsibility.

The prayer of lamentation touches pain. We are oppressed but never give up. We lament to God, but He can handle anything we throw at Him. Relating to Him is the key behind every kind of prayer, and know that whatever happens is not the last word.

When you want a different future, what would

you like to see? Once you've hashed out your complaints, don't focus on them, because you're working and hoping for a different future. This is eschatological prayer: how you want it to end.

Lament things in prayer that are lamentable or you won't get beyond them. Face that you miss old times when you knew what to expect, but the future is better and that's where you're headed. Lament is the prayer of a hopeful people; it says that what happened before will not be the usual.

How do you face your evil? One abbot remarked, "When I first came to the monastery I wondered why it says in the *Rule*, 'Thou shalt not kill.' Now I know." Your enemy-list is your prayer list, the people you are called to pray for. Rubbing shoulders is essential for forgiveness; it's the ritual of daily community life.

God is merciful and supportive, but waiting to be asked. Samuel gives us our best petition, "Speak, Lord, your servant is listening," not, "Listen, Lord, your servant is speaking." Prayer is a rehearsing- relationship, partnering with God, so we can engage with each other in beneficial directions.

The monastic community underlies the prayer we make; we are the matrix, model, and muddle (limitations). Learning to live with one another is the greatest *ascesis*, making the monastic life a slow but thorough rock-polisher, and we become well-fitted living stones, in our communities and in the Church.

As community and Church members, we are sexual, meaning that intimacy is not optional, but a chaste part of relational skills. In itself celibacy has no value, because it's an abstract. Celibates have value, because we generate, not bodily life as in marriage, but we bring forth spiritual life with our self-sacrificial love.

People are socialized to be stand-offs: "I can handle it myself. I stand alone, tall and strong." This attitude produces a walking zombie, as life-giving relationships with God-in-others are compromised.

St Bernard wrote over 80 sermons on the Song of Songs, the most erotic part of the Bible, and it's important to get in touch with your erotic side. If you stuff your energy, it will pop up in problematic ways. Sex is the hardware, and formation determines the software. Formation is

on-going, as you unlearn some things, and learn others, in order to become a more loving person in true monastic living. We live fully our humanity, and so attain to divinity. Jesus became human so that we could become fully human.

The Incarnation of God in Jesus is a role of fatherhood, our role as mentors to bring out the best in people, calling them to new life, affirming them to health. We can go beyond our imperfect backgrounds, learning to use words that are formative, since language forms people to be what they are. You are God's epiphany, presented to bring people together, and everyone in community is welcome.

Lectio is prayer that is text-based, in an important process of formation: *meditatio*, *oratio*, and *contemplatio*, but you must not stop there. Move into *operatio*. The whole point of prayer is to move to the level of better behavior. *Lectio* is thus vicarious learning, from other people's behavior. *Ruminatio* is important, digesting ideas so that they become part of you, and you have something to give back.

The Internet is the big change in transfer of information with the three A's: accessible, affordable, anonymous. The liability is pornography, the fastest growing psychological addiction in the U.S., leading to sexual self-abuse. The person is not learning to develop relationship skills, and the fantasizing invades prayer.

Lectio is the power of the Word. God speaks the world into being, and He becomes incarnated in you. *Lectio* brings growth in knowledge and love of God, and the Word becomes flesh, in us. This is the way of conversion, as we grow up into spiritual adulthood.

Conversatio is the process of maturing into a holy person, and since at least 85% of families are dysfunctional, we have a problem. The result is few relationship skills, and personal needs are not met, resulting in anxieties, compulsions, and addictions which are usually multiple: substance addictions, process addictions, relationship addictions. Even good things can be fixated upon, and individuals lose control of themselves. By

contrast, everyone is called to be in process of growing up into the fullness of the indwelling Christ.

Part of personal maturity is transparency: what you see is what you get. We grow through personal struggles, and it can get messy, but our culture encourages us to put the best spin on a description. It's a coverup. Old people don't get grouchy, grouchy people get old.

Relationships depend on communications, so the *Rule* isn't against talking, but you must make sure you have something to contribute, and that it reflects the real you.

The Jesuits are intellectual, the Franciscans have poverty, and humility

comes out of the Benedictine *Rule* in the first twelve-step program. We should incarnate humility in a special way.

A rabbi lived near an old and dying community, and they sought his wisdom for a remedy. He said, "One of you is the Messiah." They wondered who it was (It might be me!), and they were prompted to straighten out their lives. When they were seen for how well they treated each other, individuals began to join them.

We have to look at each other anew, without focusing on faults and failings, but to see the Messiah who is in fact inside. The community then becomes transparent to the work of God. We can always put a period to the end of an old story, and make a new beginning.

Abbot David Altman / Holy Trinity

“Old people don't get grouchy, grouchy people get old.”



**SOME NOTES ON THE
DEVELOPMENT
OF THE OFFICE OF
THE ABBOT GENERAL**

The founding genius of Cîteaux seems to have been to establish an “Order” in which each Community retained its juridical autonomy. At the same time there was a common spirit and common observance in each community under the authority of an abbot elected by the Community. As D Armand insists there was not a personal authority beyond the local community. The authority above the local abbot was the General Chapter composed of the abbots of all the Communities assuming a collegial pastoral responsibility for the assembled Order.

During the first two centuries of the Order, the Abbot of Cîteaux was always considered as the first among equals, exercising certain determined administrative functions related to his dignity as successor to the founders of the Order of Cîteaux. The title that he did receive around 1205 was President of the General Chapter and the head of the Definitors. These duties were well defined by detailed regulations. The Abbot General never had the power of jurisdiction for the Order.

There were occasions when the Abbot General acted in urgent cases because the Chapters had been cancelled due to war or other drastic causes. In these cases he acted as Vicar of the General Chapter. During the 14th and 15th century the Order declined not only because of the changes in society, the rise of the urban culture but also because of natural disasters and wars. The result was many monasteries being reduced to few members living in abject poverty. Their properties had been confiscated and given in “commendam” to the local friends of the rulers.

In a 1438 document addressed by Pope Eugenius IV to the Abbot of Cîteaux, Jean Picart, urging him to continue his efforts at reform, the Pope addressed him as “Abbot General.” In 1489 Pope Innocent VIII made a very clear statement that the Abbot of Cîteaux was the “primus” among the abbots since there was a very strong rivalry between the abbots of Cîteaux and Clairvaux. In 1499 the General Chapter referred to the abbot of

Cîteaux, Jean de Cirq, as the “Superior Father of the Order.”

Throughout the following centuries mainly for nationalistic reasons the Order divided itself into Congregations. For monasteries that did not fit into the Congregation arrangement, they were grouped into Provinces as administrative units. The units were not autonomous nor did they play the part of the Congregations. The Provinces had a Provincial Vicar who did the annual Visitation and reported directly to the Abbot of Cîteaux. Since there often was a long period between General Chapters, the Vicars who technically were to be appointed by the General Chapter were appointed by the Abbot of Cîteaux.

With the dissolution of Cîteaux at the time of the French Revolution, the Procurator General, resident in Rome, became the authority for the Order. This was transferred to the abbot of Santa Croce in Rome who became the Titular Head of all the Cistercians even of the developing Congregation of La Trappe. As President General, he was given the authority to confirm all elections. In 1827 Abbot Sauluier was appointed the Visitor of the Trappists in France. In 1838 he was the Procurator General in Rome.

In 1834 the Congregation of La Trappe was established by some French monasteries promising to follow the *Rule of Benedict* and the Usages of de Rancé.

In 1847 there was a New Reform at La Trappe founded on the Charter of Charity and the earliest Usages since they could not get permission to follow the de La Strange Usages. They were known as the New Reform. The other group led by the Abbot of Sept-Fons and the Abbot of Darfeld in England following the de Rancé Usages was known as the Old Reform.

In 1869 the Abbot of San Bernardo in Rome and President General of the Cistercians convened a General Chapter, the first since 1786. The Trappist Congregations were not invited. At the Chapter there was an election of an Abbot General and the Trappists were not eligible. (Is there an implication of a lack of jurisdiction in this fact?) At the Vatican Council in 1869 the Cistercians were given an invitation. The Old and New Trappist Reforms received an invitation only after the special insistence of the Pope.

In the 1870s the Old and New Trappist Reform monasteries and the Trappist Congregation of Westmalle and the Congregation of Casamari grew closer together and separated themselves more from the Cistercians. There was a Vicar General and a Superior in Rome though still technically under the Abbot General of the Cistercians.

In 1892 the four Trappist Congregations met in Rome. The Holy See demanded that they either meet under the authority of the Cistercian Abbot General or elect their own General. They chose the latter and so the birth of the Cistercians of the Strict Observance. The Casamari group did not join the “New” Order but chose to remain autonomous.

D Sebastian Wyart, a very talented person, Abbot of Sept Fons with many high placed friends in Rome, was the first Abbot General. Originally a monk of Mont de Cats in 1872. Studied in Rome and elected Abbot of Mont de Cats in 1883 and of Sept Fons in 1887. In 1889 he was in Rome as Administrator of the catacombs. He was elected Abbot General in 1892 at age 53, with the title of Abbot of Our Lady of Cîteaux. When the Order obtained the Cîteaux property, he gave up the title of Abbot of Sept Fons in 1899. He was a personal friend of Pius IX and Leo XIII. He died in 1904 at 65 and is buried at Tre Fontane. He was Abbot General for 12 years.

Bishop Augustine Marre was the second Abbot General. Born in 1853 at Aveyron in France, he entered Saint Marie du Désert in 1872 and was part of the new Community of Igny in 1876. He became Titular Prior in 1881. He is responsible for the chocolate factory at Igny. He was the first abbot of Igny when it became an abbey in 1886. He was a personal friend of the Archbishop of Reims and Pope Leo XIII named him Bishop in 1900. He was ordained Bishop in the Church of the Sisters of the Precious Blood on the Via St John Lateran, across from the Generalate of the Trappists. One of his claims to fame is that it was he who ordained Blessed Joseph Cassant priest. He was elected Abbot General on October 8, 1904 at the age of 51. He presented his resignation for reasons of health at the General Chapter of 1922 but it was not accepted. At the General Chapter of the following year it was accepted. He was 70 years old. In 1923, Pius XI,

named him titular Archbishop of Mélitène. He died at Cîteaux in 1927 at the age of 74 having been Abbot General for 19 years.

D John Baptist Ollitrault de Kéryvallan was elected Abbot General at the age of 61 in November 1923. He was born in 1862 on the Côtes d’Armor in France. He entered the Marists and then went to Melleray in June of 1885. He was superior of the foundation in England at Wood-Barton in 1901 and elected Abbot of Melleray in 1919. He was Vicar of the Order in 1922 and Abbot General the following year. He died in 1929 at 67 having been Abbot General for 6 years. He is buried at Tre Fontane.

D Herman-Joseph Smets was elected Abbot General in 1929 and fulfilled the Office for 14 years from 1929 until 1943. He had been born at Antwerp, Belgium in 1875 and entered Westmalle in 1893. He became a Definitor in 1907 and was elected Abbot of Westmalle in 1911. He was Vicar of the Order in 1923 and elected Abbot General at 54 years old in 1929. He died in 1943 and is buried at Tre Fontane.

D Dominique Nogues was elected Abbot General in 1946 and was in office for 5 years until resignation at 72 in 1951. He died six years later. He was born in Morbihan in France in 1879 and entered Timadeuc in 1901. He was Superior of Petit Clairvaux, a refuge of Timadeuc in Canada from 1912 until 1919. He was elected Abbot of Timadeuc in 1929 and Vicar of the Order the same year. He was elected Abbot General after the Second World War and the interim of *sede vacante* after the death of Abbot General Smets in 1943. Because of the Second World War the General Chapter was not convoked from 1938 until 1945. D Dominique as Vicar acted when necessary as the Vicar of the Order.

In 1951 D Gabriel Sortais was elected Abbot General and died in office in 1963 at the age of 61. He had been born in 1922 at Seine et Oise, France, entered Bellefontaine in 1924 and was postulated Abbot of Bellefontaine in 1936. He was elected Vicar of the Order in 1946 and Abbot General in 1951 at the age of 49. He fulfilled the office of Abbot General for 12 years. He is buried at Tre Fontane.

THE ROLE/SERVICE OF THE ABBOT GENERAL

D Ignace Gillet was Abbot General from 1964 until 1974, ten years. He was born in 1901 at Saint Quentin, France and entered Dombes in 1920. He was elected abbot of Dombes in 1953 and elected abbot of Aiguebelle in August of 1956 and Vicar of the Order the same year.

Following the sudden death of D Gabriel Sortais in November of 1963, D Ignace was elected Abbot General in January of 1964. In May of 1974, he resigned. He was 73 years old. He died at Acey in 1997 at the age of 96.

D Ambrose Southey was elected Abbot General in 1974 and resigned after 16 years in office in 1990. D Ambrose was born in 1923 at Whitley Bay, England. He entered Mount St Bernard in 1940 and was solemnly professed in 1945. He received a JCL from the Gregorian in 1953. He was elected Abbot of Mount St Bernard in 1959 and Vicar of the Order in 1964. At the age of 53 in 1974, D Ambrose was elected Abbot General. He resigned at the age of 67 in 1990. He returned to his monastery of stability; served as Superior ad nutum at Scourmont and Bamenda. At present he is chaplain at Vitorchiano.

D Bernardo Olivera was elected Abbot General in 1990. He was born in 1943 in Buenos Aires, Argentina. He entered Azul in 1962 and made solemn profession in 1969. He was elected Abbot of Azul in 1984 and re-elected in February of 1990. He was elected Abbot General in September of the same year, 1990, at the age of 47. He was elected by the General Chapter of the Abbots and of the General Chapter of the Abbesses. He is the first non-European Abbot General.

Using the date 2008, in one hundred and sixteen years since the union of the three Trappist Congregations, there have been nine Abbot Generals. The average years of service are eleven point seven.

(The material comes from a book by Louis Lekai, a paper done some time ago by D Armand, and information gathered by M Danièle)

D Timothy Kelly / Gethsemani / Rome

Our Abbot General, D Bernardo Olivera, had made clear at the conclusion of the 2005 MGM his intention to offer his resignation at the start of the next MGM in 2008. It is safe to presume that the General Chapters of abbots and of abbesses will vote to accept his resignation. The choice of a new abbot general for the Order will have long-term consequences for us all. To prepare our capitulants for this major responsibility now facing us, the various regions of the Order have been asked to spend time during their meetings for study and discussion together, in order to be better prepared for the coming election.

D Timothy Kelly, the procurator general, has presented us with an overview of the historical development of the office of Abbot General in our Order. I have been asked by the president of the region to offer some thoughts that will serve as a stimulus for discussion among ourselves regarding the role and service of the Abbot General, in order to aid us in our discernment process. My task has been made much easier by the circular letter of January, 2007, that D Bernardo sent to all the superiors of the Order, to aid us in understanding the complex role of the Abbot General within our Order's structure and to grasp how that role is expressed in service to the Order. We all have had opportunity to study D Bernardo's letter, but I will begin, for clarity's sake, with a general summary, out of consideration for any who may have been too busy to study it thoroughly or who like myself possibly suffer the indignities of memory loss.

There are two perspectives from which to view the role of the Abbot General in our Order: a juridical perspective favored by officials at the Vatican and any like-minded members of our Order, and the pastoral perspective more commonly appreciated by our monks and nuns. D Bernardo alluded in his circular letter to some extreme opinions of these two perspectives when he remarked that "there are persons who think that the Abbot General can do everything and others who judge that he has no authority to do anything." Since the Constitutions of our Order drawn up by our capitulants were then confirmed by the Vatican, there is no actual conflict to be

found between these two different perspectives. As it clearly states, “to the Holy See . . . belongs the authentic interpretation of the Constitutions.” (ST 79.A.a) This is not a matter of either/or but of both/and. The benefit is found in the balance.

From the perspective of the Vatican Offices, the Abbot General is considered as “the Superior of a monastic congregation” (CIC 620) and as “the Supreme Moderator of a clerical institute of pontifical right” (C.87.6) Balancing that viewpoint, from the perspective of our Order’s tradition and law, we read in the Constitutions that the Abbot General is “above all [ante omnia] to be a pastor who promotes the spirit of renewal in communities.” (C.82.1) From the viewpoint of our Order, “he acts in the name of the Order with the Holy See.” (ST 82.2.c) “He has the power to dispense in all that pertains to the proper law of the Order. However, he does not have the power to pass laws.” (C.82.4) “He is responsible for the ordinary temporal administration of the Order and is accountable to the General Chapter for it.” (ST 82.2.c) “He confirms the elections of abbots and abbesses and accepts their resignations, as vicar of the General Chapter, when the General Chapter is not in session.” (C.82.3)

This short list of powers of the Abbot General is not exhaustive but was selected by me to indicate the scope of his authority. For we all know that the abbot general is not the supreme authority within the Order. “The supreme authority of the Order is exercised by all the superiors meeting in their own General Chapter, according to their proper Constitutions. The abbots are competent to legislate for the monks [and the abbesses for the nuns] and they are responsible for the application of these laws. The ecclesiastical power of governance for the whole Order resides in the General Chapter of abbots.” (C.77.2) The Constitutions state that the abbot general “acts in the name of both General Chapters in those matters committed to him by these Chapters or by law, and in cases that cannot be deferred.” (C.82.2) Finally, C. 79 states that “it is for the General Chapter [of abbots] with the General Chapter of abbesses, according to the Constitutions, to elect officials of the Order determined by law, to watch over the manner in which they exercise their office, to

accept their resignations and if necessary to depose them.” (C.79) That this applies to the abbot general, as well as to the other officials of the Order, is shown by the regular review at each General Chapter of the acts of the abbot general since the previous Chapter.

Thus, the abbot general serves the Order with the authority given to him by the Constitutions legislated by the General Chapters and approved by the Vatican. D Bernardo, in his circular letter, distinguishes two types of authority given to the Abbot General: authority that is “ordinary and proper”, i.e. stated in the Constitutions as belonging to the Abbot General’s office, and authority that is “ordinary and vicarious”, i.e. substituting for the General Chapters. But before everything else, (ante omnia), his ministry is that of a pastor who promotes the spirit of renewal in communities. As D Bernardo states in his circular letter, “the Abbot General’s service of authority is always pastoral.” He is given the authority by the Constitutions to fulfill this pastoral ministry, and he is answerable to the Chapters for the exercise of that authority.

This brief overview of the role of the abbot general in our Order’s tradition and law is fleshed out by our own personal experiences of working with D Bernardo. These past seventeen years, his unstinted dedication to our communities has created a daunting standard for any abbot whom we choose to succeed him. The question naturally arises, whether the role is too big a burden for any one man. All abbots and abbesses have a personal style of leadership and service which is for each a unique balance of individual temperament and God’s merciful grace. Some superiors manifest boundless energy; I gaze upon them with awe and wonder. Perhaps that is one criterion to consider in viewing candidates for this vast office in our Order.

According to D Bernardo’s own testimony, his successor will have to spend eight months of every year traveling for about five years before he will have a complete sense of contact with all the communities of our Order. In the years since D Ambrose was elected general, nearly thirty-five years now, our Order has grown far larger and more complicated than it had been before 1974. Interculturalization is one aspect of that

complexity, as D Bernardo has cautioned us. Our present circumstance is an opportune time to reflect on the role and service of the abbot general today. We naturally want to maintain our accustomed sense of personal contact with the general of the Order, a feat which D Bernardo managed to achieve with apparent ease but, I suspect, at great personal cost. The question arises how can that still be managed by anyone today?

From his years of experience as abbot general, D Bernardo suggests to us a list of obvious priorities to which his successor will need to be sensitive: “communities in a ‘precarious situation’ in the most complete sense of the term: there are about forty (40) communities in the Order in this situation”; “communities in need of means and assistance in the area of formation”; and “modifications in the structures of the Order, in order to adapt them to the rapid cultural changes of today’s world.”

Has the time come for our various regions to take on a greater responsibility for themselves? This has already begun by the neighboring superiors of precarious communities forming commissions for the future to support them. However, is that direction a path that could lead to disintegration for our Order? Are we finding ourselves caught between a rock and a hard place in our Order’s history? Perhaps the natural deaths of a number of these forty or so precarious communities will reduce the strain on our expanding Order, in the inexorable course of events.

But until such a course of events is conscientiously concluded, extra demands for the care of each of these houses and for the dignity of their individual monks and nuns will require an even greater strain on their care-givers. Should this demand fall on the abbot general and his council, or on the fathers immediate, on the commissions for the future, the various regions as a corporate whole, or on another yet-unformed body?

In the circular letter of D Bernardo, he points out that the selection of a new abbot general entails practical procedures which we as a region need to consider in order to form recommendations that we should pass on to the Central Commissions. Once the resignation of D Bernardo has been accepted, the General Chapters then have to decide on the

length of time the next abbot general will hold office, either the present practice of an indeterminate term of office until the age of seventy-five or for a set period of years, such as ten, fifteen, or twenty years. The process of discernment of candidates for the office needs also to be studied, whether the election of the new abbot general should be preceded by a designated day of prayer, whether the electors should hold scheduled periods of discussion in small groups and what composition those groups should have, whether there needs to be a list of criterion drawn up for suitable qualities for the candidates, etc. These matters need to be addressed initially by us at this regional meeting. The various regions’ contributions will be taken up at the meeting of the Central Commissions. The process may need to be considered further at the next regional meeting in 2008 and again, if necessary, at the General Chapter itself.

One significant reflection which needs to be singled out here and now is the question of eligibility. Who is eligible to be chosen as our new abbot general? D Bernardo observed that his dream of an abbess general of our Order has not yet awakened to the morning light of reality. There exists another apparent category of those excluded through no fault of their own from eligibility: the superiors of those autonomous houses that are not designated as abbeys but as major or simple priories. The interpretation of our Constitutions that titular priors are ineligible is being strongly debated at the moment. For example, superiors such as F Placido of the Andes in Venezuela, F Bernardo of Novo Mundo in Brazil, and F Jesús of Miraflores in Chile are declared ineligible since their monasteries are not abbeys but major priories. It can be argued that C.34.2 which states “Everything said about an abbot applies equally to the prior of a priory . . . unless explicit exception is made.” Has an explicit exception regarding the eligibility of priors of priories for election as abbot general been anywhere made in the Constitutions? I have not found any such reference. It is my understanding that in the interpretation of the law, restrictions and prohibitions are to be applied in a minimalist manner.

Might our election of an abbot general be at risk of being declared invalid, if we do not include

all those who are actually eligible? A problem for our canonists to solve and for the Central Commissions to pursue.

What other criteria of eligibility need to be considered from a practical point of view? Should an abbot be considered eligible who has been in office for less than five or six years? Is there a factor of inexperience to weigh in light of the greater responsibility of the office of abbot general? Should an abbot realistically be considered a candidate who has already reached the age of seventy years? If it takes about five years for an abbot general just to get a full grasp of the communities of the Order, one who is near seventy would reach the retirement age just as he begins to reach a sense of the Order's identity. How well could a person in his seventies tolerate the lengthy and arduous demands of travel to some of those out-of-the-way places to which our monasteries seem to be drawn? In practice, would we be wise to consider an abbot who is between forty-five and sixty-five years old, and at least five years in office, as a realistic candidate for the office of abbot general?

D Bernardo concluded his circular letter to the superiors of the Order with a prophetic message addressed both to the capitulants of the 2008 MGM and, beyond them, to all the communities of the Order. He entitled this final section, "Intercultural Relations". D Bernardo is speaking generally here. He is not speaking specifically about the role of the abbot general, but any candidate for the office of general will be considered for suitability in light of his sensitivity to intercultural relations within the Order. I recommend a careful re-reading of this final section of D Bernardo's letter, as a salutary self-examination for all of our superiors, for we share in the "common solicitude for all the communities of the Order in matters both human and divine." In fact, how many of our western communities today have as their members monks and nuns who were born in Asia, in Latin America, or in Africa, or whose parents were born there?

We plead earnestly to the Holy Spirit, through the intercession of Mary Mother of Cîteaux, to guide our minds and hearts wisely in these coming days of discernment, that we may be the instruments of God's providence to serve our Cistercian Order in these demanding times.

Abbot Robert Barnes / Berryville

CONFESSIONS OF A DEAD-BEAT MONK

Of course, I've set the same bench brushing off flies and thoughts, how many years? What winters of silence and summer variations,

what prodigies of mockingbirds I've heard! And that kitchen job! Broccoli and spuds on Mondays, rice twice a week, and Oh,

toasted cheese sandwiches, Fridays! This diet of psalms, fifty and hundred, runs ever on from bitter to sweet,

returns like the sun to bow and stand. And I tread the same stairs and stare at walls, blank or lit rose and gold. I rise

with whippoorwills singing at 3, though night ever keeps its secret from me, 'till in its treasure I'm locked.

Then I will be what always has been, that enigma of sameness between now and the then.

B Paul Quenon / Gethsemani

**SCHEDULED MEETINGS
OCSO -USA REGION
UPDATED: JANUARY, 2008**

MEETING Organizers	DATES arrival - departure	PLACE Presenters
Novice Directors S Claire-Crozet F James-Berryville	April 8 - 17, 2008	Holy Spirit M Gail Fitzpatrick D Joseph Boyle
Junior Seminar B Anthony-Genesee	April 14 - 28, 2008	New Melleray F David Bock S Anne Elizabeth Sweet
Regional Meeting M Kathy DeVico-Redwoods	June 4-11, 2008	Snowmass
Regional Formation Secretaries Meeting S Pamela - Wrentham	June 10-19, 2008	Tre Fontane D Bernardo Olivera
General Chapter	September 2 - 23, 2008	Domus Pacis - Assisi
Junior Seminar B Anthony-Genesee	April 27-May 11, 2009	Snowmass

Please send corrections & additions to the
Regional Secretary for Formation at
AnthonyWeber@GeneseeAbbey.org

NOTES:

SPARED
(Editor's column)

Even the most observant monks and nuns have to leave the confines of the enclosure from time to time. When we do, we are often amazed at the level of speed and noise of the outside world. We do not judge any brother or sister, and are often confounded by their endurance of the materialism and commercialism of the everyday. We claim to have left the world and its manners. Are the ways of the monastery any better? Are *we* any better? God forbid that a monk or nun succumb to some sort of arrogance or superiority vis-à-vis any other person. Then there is the issue of the world having the answers. We are often prompted to forget the biblical admonition against the world, the flesh, and the devil. Has modern spirituality gone soft on these topics? Does a sort of spirituality-lite creep in with compromises and accommodations? And how can we be thankful enough for escaping the insults and insinuations of the realm of advertising? To be screamed at all day long by someone wanting to sell something? Let us hasten then to be grateful, without complacency, for a wholesome environment. Let us make a conscious effort to promote peace and quiet and non-violence in our place and space. Let us show by our practice and our preference, a place of tranquility and sanity, in a world consumed by mercantilism and noise. Above all, let us keep our minds and hearts from agitation and chatter, so that we can be persons of love and forgiveness, peace and presence.

c.w. / Gethsemani

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Abbey of Gethsemani
3642 Monks Road
Trappist, KY 40051 USA

email: cweber@monks.org