

## COVENANT OF UNITY

In joyful association with the Gethsemani Abbey community we, the Lay Cistercians of Gethsemani Abbey, pledge ourselves individually and in community to devotion to Jesus Christ, the Virgin Mary, the Rule of Benedict, the life of prayer and work as maintained by the Cistercian charism. We pledge constant effort to conform our lives toward love of God and our brothers and sisters. To effect this devotion our local communities and the members thereof affirm, adopt, and dutifully implement the following Covenant of Unity.

With the Gethsemani Conventual Community:

1. LCG is privileged to be recognized by the Conventual Chapter of Gethsemani (vote 3/18/12) and affirms its great responsibility to respect the monastic enclosure and Cistercian charism.

Local Community Guidelines:

1. The local communities of Lay Cistercians of Gethsemani Abbey are: Caritas, Chicago, Cincinnati, Cleveland, Columbus, Indiana, Kentucky, Michigan, Tennessee and Spiritus an on line group.

2. We confirm that a local LCG community preferably should meet at least eight times a year.

3. Local communities should maintain a minimum of 3 members.

4. Community leadership should be selected within the community. The community leaders must be an LCG member. Their main responsibilities are to coordinate/facilitate the local LCG meetings. In most cases, the community leaders serve on the LCG Advisory Council.

5. Communities must maintain liaison and participation in the wider community of LCG with no more than two representatives on the LCG Advisory Council.

6. Annually, each local community will submit a House Report to the LCG Advisory Council to assess the health, goals, programs and spiritual devotion of each local community and its members, and to ensure that each local community understands its obligations as a member of the LCG family and is striving to meet those obligations. To foster a spirit of common devotion to the goals of LCG, the spirit of Gethsemani Abbey, and the Cistercian charism, and to encourage ongoing self-assessment and sharing of best practices, the House Reports will be shared with all local communities.

7. Should a community be unable to maintain these guidelines the community will be offered a period of discernment during which concerted effort and support will be offered by LCG and the constituent communities to address opportunities for improvement.

8. If a local community, after discernment period of at least three years, is unable to revive and maintain local community standards as in number 2 and 3 above, the community shall no longer be recognized as an LCG local community, and existing members thereof shall have the option to become an Affiliate member or join another existing LCG group.

9. All who are attached to LCG shall be aware of and affirm our common heritage and specifically the elements common to lay Cistercians developed in the attached Identity document.

10. We recognize a calling by laypeople seeking a close relationship with the Cistercian charism as lived at Gethsemani Abbey and by LCG sisters and brothers. In response, our local communities welcome inquiries and, as appropriate, facilitate the creation and nourishment of new communities that may be some distance from the existing community.

#### Membership Guidelines:

LCG recognizes three degrees of attachment: Member, Affiliate and Friend.

1. Members have successfully completed the candidate formation process offered by LCG, have consistently maintained their acknowledged dedication to and participation in the activity of the local community, and have formally acknowledged their pledge of commitment to the LCG community and to live according to the LCG Plan of Life. Members must also maintain their active participation in ongoing formation as provided by their local community and by the LCG, consistently meet with and support their local community brothers and sisters, and attend an LCG retreat at Gethsemani Abbey once every 2 years if possible.

2. Affiliate members were active members but are unable to maintain a connection to an established community. This member may be considered an Affiliate when health, geography or other reason prevent them from actively participating in the local community. Affiliate members are accorded this status by vote of the local community which shall be reaffirmed annually by the local LCG community. Affiliate status affirms a person's continuing and devoted filiation with the LCG but recognizes that due to personal circumstances full membership participation is unattainable at this time.

3. Friends are those interested in and supportive of the Lay Cistercians of Gethsemani but who are unable or unwilling to become/remain members. LCG actively encourages people to be Friends who, by their interest and support, affirm their dedication to and prayers for LCG.

#### Advisory Council:

1. The LCG Advisory Council is composed of representatives of the recognized local communities and consistent with the adopted bylaws of the Council.

2. The Advisory Council affirms and maintains close relationship with Gethsemani and the Abbot's appointed representatives. The Council shall keep Gethsemani liaisons informed of local community developments and, in conjunction therewith, develop programs and guidelines to affect the quality and constancy demanded by our dedication to the Rule of Benedict, the Abbot of Gethsemani and the coenobitic community, the International Association of Lay Cistercian Communities, and the guidance and spirit offered by the OCSO.

3. Paramount among projects is attention to the formation of members. The Council shall develop and consistently evaluate the ongoing formation of candidates for membership, provide materials and programs for continuing formation of members, and shall make effort to provide for the wider community the materials to enable others to taste and savor the joys and advantages of the Cistercian charism.

4. Local communities are authorized and affirmed by the Advisory Council. Such communities shall conform to Guidelines approved by the Council.

5. Recognizing the advances of electronic communication, the Council shall consciously and consistently be attuned to methods whereby a wider community of those devoted to the charism may access and progress in their spiritual journey through these means.

6. To assure consistent and devoted attention to formation and mentoring the Council shall implement a program to guide mentoring and formation of LCG members. It is suggested that implementation shall include periodic training of mentor-leaders at Gethsemani Abbey.

Covenant April 13, 2013

Amended/Adopted April 17, 2016.

Amended/Adopted April 27, 2019