

# Bringing the Cistercian Charism to the World

## English Commission Synthesis

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*“The only way for us to give witness is...to be what we are in the midst of banal, everyday realities.”*  
-Fr. Christian de Chergé

Being Cistercian in the world is our form of Christian vocation. As lay Cistercians our mission is to embody the Cistercian charism in our lives beyond the monastery walls.

The Cistercian charism is characterized first of all by the individual’s search for God that takes place in community, in the work and common prayer that sustain the community, and in the silence and solitude of contemplative prayer. It engenders mindfulness, humility, gratitude, and a deep love for all peoples, and, indeed, for the whole of creation. Lay Cistercians, with guidance from their monastic advisors, find ways to adapt and incorporate into their day-to-day lives Cistercian habits of prayer, work, and contemplation. The love that characterizes the Lay Cistercian communities and nourishes us also characterizes each member’s way of being in the world.

The social context in which we live influences how we seek to engage with the ‘world’. We share the charism by our way of being as much as by our way of acting. What is important is the interior state of our heart. Our openness to the divine Light in prayer, rather than through any specific activities, is the basis for our authenticity in our ‘being in the world.’

As we come to knowledge of our own true selves before God – our own enormous brokenness and need for Christ’s wholeness – we also come to recognize the face of Christ in all whom we meet, and we welcome each who comes our way as if that person were Christ. As we mature in the charism, Lay Cistercians strive to become points of centeredness, compassion, and *caritas* in all our relationships, whether familial, social, or occupational. Each moment of life becomes a moment of sharing and encountering the grace and peace of Christ.

We seek to serve as witnesses by manifesting the Cistercian values in the way we live our everyday lives.

- Seeking the Divine Light through guarding the inner life of adoration and love of God;
- Seeking a balance of prayer, work, and reflection in our daily lives with silence and simplicity; and,
- Seeking to live in love for those around us in and through our ordinary activities of family and work life as inspired by the Holy Spirit;

The contemplative life leads, paradoxically, to a greater awareness of the world and its needs. Thus, lay Cistercians, as individuals and as communities, do not turn inward. Rather, following the promptings of the Holy Spirit and graced by the fruits of a contemplative life, we respond to the needs of those whom we encounter as we can in our various states of life. That response is characterized by generosity, humility, and a genuine concern for the dignity and well-being of all people.

We consider ourselves as servants of God, therefore, service is our everyday task. Recognizing that the specific “what, when, where and how” are impossible to define, we seek to serve by:

- Actively expressing communality in all aspects of our life;
- Fostering a relationship of service with the monastic community;
- Offering hospitality and service to one another as associates in our local communities or individually; and,
- Engaging compassionately with the world.

We wish to convey to others what we value in the Cistercian charism. This work of God cannot be closed in on ourselves. Therefore, we need to be open to the opportunities for meaningful engagement with the world that become available and then act in a nuanced way, recognizing that the Holy Spirit is active among all people and traditions.

We seek to give witness to this by:

- Fostering active ecumenical and interfaith engagement;
- Responding selflessly to the needs of those in relationship with us;
- Practicing mercy to all whom we encounter;
- Living in harmony with the world, through simplicity and austerity in meeting our material needs and exercising stewardship of all resources; and,
- Demonstrating that it is possible to live together as one family in God in the world.

The interior freedom that is the fruit of the lay Cistercian contemplative life allows honest and compassionate dialogue with the world in which we live. It is in that dialogue that our vocation is fulfilled; embracing all the reality of our lives in light of the Divine Reality that embraces all of creation.