Document extrait du site de l'abbaye Notre-Dame de Scourmont, qui se trouve sur le territoire de Forges, à sept kilomètres au sud de la ville de Chimay, en Belgique. Notre-Dame de Scourmont est une abbaye de l'Ordre Cistercien de la Stricte Observance.

STATUTE
ON THE REGULAR VISITATION

Updated after the 2022 General Chapter

Nature of the Visitation

1. The monasteries of the **Order**, while remaining autonomous, are joined together by the bond of charity and by a common tradition of doctrine and law. Their superiors are united by the bond of solicitude for the welfare of each community, and this pastoral solicitude is particularly exercised through the institution of the Regular Visitation.[1] Each community is visited at least once every two years.[2]

2. The **Regular Visitation** is a moment of communion in the common Cistercian grace, an expression of the responsibility of each community to all the other communities of the Order aiming at a living fidelity to the Cistercian *conversatio*. Its purpose is to motivate the brothers/sisters to lead the Cistercian life with renewed spiritual vigilance, and to strengthen, supplement, and when needed, correct the pastoral action of the local abbot/abbess.[3]

3. The **brothers/sisters** will welcome the Visitor in faith and joy.[4] They will make every effort to see the Visitation as a call to personal and communal conversion. They will accept with respect and humility the suggestions, directives and corrections of the Visitor.

4. The **superior** of the community visited will receive with confidence the Visitor who comes to assist him/her in his/her pastoral responsibility, knowing that the success of the Visitation depends in part on his/her cooperation seeking the good of the community and of each brother/sister.

5. The **Visitor** will show great respect for the community visited and for its superior, trusting in the Spirit working in each person. He will help the community to examine itself on the quality of its monastic life and to perceive God's call. He will faithfully observe the prescriptions of law, the spirit of the Charter of Charity and the norms of the present Statute approved by the General Chapter.

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6. A **shared understanding** between the Visitor, the Community to be visited and the superior is crucial for the abiding fruitfulness of the Visitation. Therefore, all will accompany the Visitation with their prayer and will be mindful of their fidelity to the Gospel and the Rule of St. Benedict, the Constitutions of the Order, the directives of the General Chapter, and to the grace proper to each community.

The Visitor

7. The monasteries of the Order are visited by the Father Immediate. In addition, the Abbot General can visit them. The Father Immediate and the Abbot General may delegate another person to make the Visitation[5]. For **monasteries of nuns**, the Father Immediate must delegate another person at least once every six years[6].

8.

a) **In the monasteries of Nuns**, the delegated person may be the superior, monk or nun, of an autonomous monastery. Also, the Visitor can be a retired abbot (or titular prior) or a retired abbess (or titular prioress), a Councilor, monk or nun, of the Abbot General.

b) **In the monastery of monks**, the delegated visitor can be the superior of an autonomous monastery. He also may be a retired abbot (or titular prior) or a monk Councilor of the Abbot General.

Whenever there is **a delegation of a Visitor**, the local superior must be consulted. Furthermore, the superior of the monastery being visited must consult the community in all the cases when the person being delegated is not the superior of an autonomous monastery of monks.

The Assistant Visitor[7]

9.

a) The Visitor can be **accompanied** by another person, after having consulted the local superior concerning the principle by which the person is chosen. The local superior in his/her turn will consult the community.

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b) In **the monasteries of nuns or monks**, the person accompanying the Visitor can be the superior, monk or nun, of an autonomous monastery. Also, the person accompanying may be a retired superior, monk or nun of an autonomous monastery, or a Councilor, monk or nun, of the Abbot General.

c) However, in all the circumstances there is only one official Visitor, with whom all the community must visit. The person who accompanies the Visitor assists with his/her counsel and fulfils all the tasks that are entrusted to him/her. The Visitor will inform the Community of the manner in which he and his assistant will proceed during the visit.

Particular Situations

10.

a) A new Abbot is encouraged to have a person of more experience to accompany him in his ministry as Visitor.

b) Whenever a community and its superior express the **desire** for a delegated Visitor or someone to accompany the Visitor, this desire must be given serious consideration and respected to the degree possible.

c) In **the monasteries of monks and of nuns**, the Visitor can also be accompanied by an expert in some particular field, after having consulted the community as outlined in n° 9.a.

11.

a) In monasteries of monks where the Father Immediate is of a **different culture**, he can delegate from time to time a Visitor of the same culture as the community, in so far as it is possible. In the same way, when the Father Immediate is of the same culture as the daughter-house, he can delegate from time to time a Visitor of another culture.

b) When the Father Immediate is not of the same language as the community visited, he can delegate from time to time someone of the same language as the community. Whenever an interpreter is necessary, the person chosen must be approved by the conventual chapter of the community being visited, and this interpreter is bound to the same confidentiality as the Visitor himself.

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Preparation for the Visitation

12. All prepare for the Visitation with **prayer**, asking the light of the Holy Spirit for the community itself and for the Visitor, and also the grace of true discernment and good zeal[8].The Mass of the Holy Spirit will be celebrated on the day of the opening of the Visitation.

13. The **local superior** will lead the community in its preparation and can give some talks on the importance of the Visitation. He/she will encourage all the brothers/sisters to be open and honest with the Visitor and should leave them complete liberty in this regard.

14. It is also desirable for the **community** to examine itself beforehand concerning its needs at this moment of its history. This examination can take the form of community dialogues, meetings of the Council, or other ways apt to stimulate the collaboration of all. A few major themes can be identified that are to be treated during the Visitation. If the community draws up a text to help the Visitor, he will not limit himself to the points contained in such a document. Moreover, if the Visitor proposes a particular method of preparation, the community will make an effort to co-operate.

15. For his part, the **Visitor**, especially if he is not the Father Immediate, will inform himself as best he can, on everything concerning the community he will visit. He will communicate honestly with the superior, who will share with him in detail the preparations made by the community. If the Visitation is going to be of a special character because the community finds itself at a critical moment in its history, the Visitor asks God for the grace of discernment as well as the necessary courage to take the measures that may be needed.

During the Visitation

16. The following points constitute some of the more important aspects of the **community life.** According to circumstances the Visitor will examine certain ones more specifically :

a) the level of charity, obedience and unity in the community, (C. 13-16);
b) the spirit and celebration of the liturgy, (C. 17-19);
c) the balance between lectio, prayer and work (C. 20-23; 26);
d) silence and separation from the world, and observance of enclosure (C. 24; 29);
e) fidelity to live monastic ascesis in evangelical poverty and simplicity (C. 25; 27; 28);

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f) hospitality and apostolate (C. 30-31);

g) the existence and implementation of a protocol on all forms of abuse; (C 30bis) [vote #123, GC-Part II, 2022]
h) the service of the various officers (C. 35);
i) the functioning of the various councils (C. 36);
j) the financial condition of the monastery and its temporal administration (C. 43.3; 74.3);

k) the discernment of vocations and [vote #102, GC-Part II, 2022] the quality of initial and ongoing formation (C. 45ss and n. 66 of the Ratio Institutionis);
l) the relationship with the absent brothers/sisters and the foundations;
m) the state of physical health in the community;
n) the ministry of the chaplain, in monasteries of nuns (C. 76);
o) the relationship with the Order and the local Church (C. 31.32; 77ss).

17. During the Visitation all the professed members of the **community** have the right and duty to meet privately with the Visitor. They share with him their vision of the community, its strong points, its challenges and problems. They answer his questions with honesty and charity. However, it is not necessary or permissible to mention the secret faults of a brother/sister unless they are likely to become public or to harm the monastery in a serious way.[9] Likewise, it is considered reprehensible to save up for the Visitation matters that could and should have been corrected before the Visitor's arrival. If the Visitor holds community dialogues during the Visitation, all should participate and contribute as much as possible to the exchange.

Furthermore, the Visitor has **the right to visit the places** where the brothers/sisters live and work.

18. Even if the Visitation is done by the Father Immediate, the **superior** keeps his/her ordinary power in the monastery during the Visitation.[10] However, in confidence, he/she should put all necessary information on the community and his/her administration at the disposal of the Visitor. He/She should not, in any way, try to find out who has made critical remarks to the Visitor. He/She shall maintain a kind attitude towards those whom he/she thinks may have said something negative to the visitor.[11]

19. The **Visitor**, in a spirit of faith in the work of the Spirit in each monk/nun and each community, will act with great tact and charity. He will suggest opportune ways to stimulate the community's growth in fidelity to its Cistercian vocation and will help it to

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resolve its difficulties. Remembering the healthy pluralism allowed by the Constitutions, he will not try to impose on the house visited the decisions taken in his own community. Great objectivity and discernment will be needed in judging whether the essential Cistercian values are being safeguarded or endangered, as also to get an objective idea of the real situation of the community after being exposed to many different points of view. If something needs to be corrected, he will do it with prudence and kindness.[12]

20. The **Visitor** is responsible for helping the local superior in the exercise of his/her pastoral function. He can do this through the advice he gives the superior, and remarks addressed to the community. If he comes to the conclusion that the superior's pastoral action is wrong or defective in some point, then he has the right and duty to correct it, being careful not to weaken the Superior's authority.

21. If, after having listened to the brothers/sisters and examined the overall situation in the community as carefully as possible, he arrives at the conclusion that the good of the community suggests or even requires a change of superior, he will inform the latter with courage and kindness.[13] However, he will first consult the Father Immediate, if he is not himself the Father Immediate of the house being visited.

22. The Visitor should not act hastily. He should dialogue with the Superior and, as far as possible, with the community (or, at least, with the Council) before taking important decisions. This implies leaving sufficient time to complete the Visitation.[14] In exceptional cases, the Visitor, after consulting the Superior, may remove an officer in charge (e.g., the cellarer, the Prior or the Director of Novices) or the head of a department from office, but he has no power to appoint a successor. If he is not the Father Immediate, the Visitor should inform the latter of his decision.[15]

Closure of the Visitation

23. At the end of his Visitation, the Visitor will leave the community visited a document traditionally called the **"Visitation Card."** He should take great care in drawing it up, making it clear that he has listened to what he has been told and has tried to grasp the true picture of the community. He will summarize the community's view of itself. He will add his own perception of the situation of the community and will add his advice, encouragement, and, if necessary, a summons to conversion, indicating those areas where further growth would be desirable. Rather than presenting a long list of small points

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of observance, he will concentrate on certain essential aspects. He can leave an additional list of remarks that are less important.

24. It could be useful for the Visitor to present the community or at least the council with the most important points of the Visitation Card, so that they can reflect upon them and discuss them in community dialogues before writing up the final text. He should discuss at least with the local superior both the contents of the Visitation Card and the remarks he intends to make after it has been read.[16] The Regular Visitation is usually **closed** with the reading of the "Visitation Card." In exceptional cases, the Visitor may leave the Visitation **open** for a limited and definite period of time after having consulted with the local community and the superior as well as the Father Immediate.

After the Visitation

25. The local **community** and its superior should do all in their power to put into practice the recommendations of the Visitor in a spirit of faith and communion with the whole Order. The Visitation Card will be read a few times a year, according to the indications of the Visitor, and the community, on that occasion, will reflect on its response to the grace received during the Visitation, and on the Visitation Card itself and the other recommendations of the Visitor. The **Superior** has a specific responsibility in this regard. He/She should, with the help of his/her council, promote that reflection and that evaluation within his/her community.

26. The **Visitor** is to send a copy of the Visitation Card along with a report giving additional information on the Visitation to the Abbot General within two months. A delegated Visitor is also to send these documents to the Father Immediate. In the report he may invite him to be particularly attentive to the implementation of some recommendations made during the Visitation.[17] These reports should agree substantially with the Card read to the Community. However, if the Visitor feels that he was not able to say everything in the Card, he should explain this to the Abbot General and suggest that the other matters be addressed at the next Visitation.[18]

27. The **Abbot General** may respond to the report of the Visitation, either personally, or through his Council after evaluating the questions raised in it. He may suggest further means for helping the Community to continue its journey in the Cistercian vocation.

28. The local **superior** may always, after consulting with his/her Council or even with the entire community, send an evaluation of the Regular Visitation to the Abbot General and the Father Immediate. This evaluation may also be shared with the Regional Conference, if the

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superior so wishes.

29. A superior or his/her community may always have recourse against a Visitation. It is made to the General Chapter or, between Chapters, to the Abbot General acting as vicar of the Chapter. Recourse to the Holy See is always possible.

30. Both the Visitor and the community visited should remember that the persons who took part in the Visitation have a right to **confidentiality** and the duty to observe it. The Visitor should not reveal the names of those who made remarks, and should consider himself bound to a great discretion in everything that concerns the community that he has visited.

Conclusion

31. The Regular Visitation is an expression of the bond of charity between the houses of the Order. When it is prepared and lived in this manner, it constitutes a choice spiritual event that is offered to each community in order to assure its growth in the fidelity to the Cistercian grace.

NOTES

[1] *Carta Caritatis*, nn. 3-4; C. 71

[2] ST 75.2.B.

[3] C.75.2.

[4] *Carta Caritatis*, n.5.

[5] C 75.1

[6] Cf. Gen. Chap. 2022/2, vote 24

[7] ST 75.1.A

[8] Cf. RB 72.

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[9] Cf. Can 628.3.

[10] Cf. Vincent HERMANS, *Commentarium Cisterciense* (Romae 1961), p. 159.

[11] Cf. *De Forma Visitationis; Can. 628.3*.

[12] *De Forma Visitationis*, ST XXXIII in *Instituta Generalis Capituli apud Cistercium*.

[13] General Chapter of 1969, 22nd session, p. 87; 26th session, p. 124.

[14] Cf. General Chapter, 1971, vote 28 et Canivez, 1738, n.126.

[15] Cf. Canivez, *Statuta Capitulorum Generalium,* Louvain 1933 under 1189 n.2; 1201 n.6; Acts of the General Chapter of 1948 p.23; Vincent HERMANS, *Commentarium Cisterciense,* Romae 1961 p.208).

[16] Cf. General Chapter 1950, p.12.

[17] . ST. 75.2.C.

[18] Cf. General Chapter of 1971, vote 30.

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