

Report on the 2017 meeting of the International Association of Lay Cistercian Communities

Dear all,

Greetings from Martha and Katrien,

What follows is a brief report on the International meeting of Lay Cisterians that was held in Ávila. This report was written by Katrien and revised by Martha.

Travel:

We met in Madrid, stayed in the same room at the same hostel, and enjoyed the city and its museums in spite of 100 F/40 C heat before travelling to Ávila. Our travel to Ávila started on Friday afternoon with an introduction to organized dis-organization at the railway station. We bought our ticket to Ávila and had the number of our inter-regional train; we were told to watch the boards displaying the train departures to get the platform number where we would board the train... seems simple but ... the system is different from the systems we are used to. Not only do all trains not show on all boards, we were only informed about the platform a minute before the arrival of the train! Martha managed to get to the platform and I joined her there as I was watching another of the screens announcing train arrivals and departures... The travel to Ávila by train provided magnificent views of the changing landscape through some mountainous areas, pines (harvest of the sieve/pine-nut harvest?), olive plantations, and pastures with the Spanish bulls. We entered Ávila station two hours later. On the platform: five lay Cistercians: Martha and myself, one participant from Grenoble, and two from New Zealand (Peter Stuart is no longer able to come)... we tried to get one taxi but no : different from the African context where we would be able to join in one cab ... here 4 persons per taxi so ... we got split but joined again at the CITEs gate.

The CITEs centre:

The meeting took place in the CITEs (Centro Internacional Teresiano-Sanjuanista – International Teresa-Saint John Center), a center with a spiritual community whose architecture is based on the spirituality of Saint Theresa of Ávila. (website is www.mistica.es) The whole building is shaped like a thick outline of a star, and at night when it's lit, it shines like one as well! At the opening session of the meeting we were introduced to the logic that led to the creation of the building. The logic is that we are invited to descend into the centre of our being = you arrive at the 0 level and there is no second or first floor but a minus one and minus two floor... at the center are the meeting rooms, the dining room and cafeteria, and the worship/church areas, around are the meeting rooms and the rooms for visitors. There are at the center as well several interior gardens with silence, sometimes a fountain, and time to be with the Lord. From our

windows, we could see the old city wall of Ávila (picture below), and several times a day hear all the church bells ringing – not tuned to the same pitches, nor starting at quite the same times.

The meeting:

The meeting started with Eucharist presided at by the bishop of Ávila (Jesus Garcia Burillo). We were told his homily should be available on the website of the international lay Cistercian site, but Martha does not see it there yet. The bishop encouraged us to go deeper into the theme chosen for our meeting “look how they love each other” and pointed to the motivation and driving force of the Apostle Paul in the love of Christ, and how the love of Christ changed Paul’s perspective on himself and the world. We live as branches on the vine and as laity we are called to live our commitment united to Christ in Love; our vocation as lay Cistercians is a great challenge in the society that has values contrary to the Gospel.

After the introductory word by Dom Armand (he has been guiding the international committee since the start) who reminded us of the importance of bylaws as they provide the base for harmonious living and collective life with a base to manage tensions, we were informed about the objectives of the meeting: (i) finalize a text on “See how they love one another” and (ii) validate the bylaws of the community of lay Cistercians. One might say also that one of the main purposes of coming together at these meetings is for lay Cistercians from all over the world to build personal relationships that enable us to love as brothers and sisters all lay Cistercians, not just those in our own groups.

The daily schedule was based on the Liturgy of the Hours, with Mass and Lauds at the start of the day, None prayed at the start of the afternoon meeting, Vespers before supper, and Compline afterwards. The kitchen yielded to non-Spanish habits: we had breakfast at 8 instead of 9, lunch at 1 instead of 2, and supper at 8 instead of 9.

The first days were used to hold discussions on the martyr texts of “See how they love one another” and of the statutes. The language commissions (French, English and Spanish) met in the afternoons and appointed one or two of their members to the committee that was to finalize the text agreed on by language groups (the martyr text [available on the international website] was made up of paragraphs from French, English, and Spanish summaries of texts received from the communities, and the final text agreed upon during regional meetings that took place in the last quarter of 2016). Martha Krieg and Scott Gilliam (Holy Spirit) were our (English commission) representatives to the Text Commission, which finalized the text of the “See how they love one another” document; that was enough work that the Executive Committee resolved the merges on the statutes.

We were given a presentation by Dom Isidoro, abbot of the monastery of Santa Maria de Huer-

ta (notes should be available on the website), challenging us to formulate our vision and to grow in unity. The presentation by Dom Isidoro gave us some interesting points of view that were partly integrated in the final text on “See how they love one another”.

Tuesday morning we were presented a talk by Dom Mauro. He is the Abbot General of the Cistercian Order (Common Observance): theme was “The Community: Truth and Mercy”. Dom Mauro gave us some insights in the importance of truth and how half-lies deceive more than whole lies. Dom Mauro referred to the Mt 5.37 passage and Apocalypse 3.15-16, explaining how difficult it becomes to live in community where half-truths and half-lies, half falsehood are hidden inside—and how a sane community life should both provoke our discomfort with our current spiritual state, and then help in our process of conversion, which is essential for the exercise of mercy. He commented that as a monastic Visitor, one of the hardest things to deal with was finding half-truths in the individual reports, because it became difficult to impossible to figure out who was telling the truth, because people were not being honest even with themselves.

On Wednesday we had a leisure day: visiting Ávila with a guide for each language group. We started at the Incarnation monastery where Teresa lived and had her encounters with the Lord; we visited the center where the relics of Teresa were held, the ramparts, and the Cathedral. By then it was 1:30 and we finally enjoyed a festive lunch starting appetizers and drinks, and moving on to two dishes that were the food of the poor (a potato soup with bacon, and a soup with beans), the second dish was fish or meat and was traditional food of the region. Tina Parayre came around to tell us that the selection of peasant food was deliberate: it was very similar to what Teresa and her nuns would have eaten.

The meeting on Thursday validated the final texts and on Friday we elected the council. Dom Eamon, Abbot General of OCSO, joined us for the last sessions, celebrated Mass and joined the meeting presenting some of new forms of Cistercian charism with an example of a foundation by one of the monastic communities where few monks are living together in an ordinary house and represent monastic life in 2017....

The finalized statutes and text on “See how they love one another “ are on the International website.

Pictures of our meetings, visit to Ávila, Eucharists, festive dinner and CITEs will most probably also be posted on the international website. Below you will find the group picture taken the last day of the meeting, most likely by Isabel Tobey.

Now that the legislative sort of documents required to function smoothly have been created, all of us who were present (as well as many of you who were not) are looking forward to holding meetings that do more to advance the spiritual side of our lay Cistercian call.

The next International meeting will be held in the US and themes suggested by participants are:

- Celebrate the lay Cistercian charism: sharing how we live the charism in practice
- Life story and work of Thomas Merton
- Learn from one another
- Continual conversion
- How to spread the news about Lay Cistercian charism and external oriented communication
- History of the order
- Christology of our charism
- Building on the ideas brought forward by Peter Stuart (New Zealand) on how to share the Cistercian charism with the world
- Growing in the Cistercian charism in a turbulent world

Family picture, picture of the meeting room and participants, and of opening Mass. In the meeting-room picture, Linda Harrington is left of the aisle (as you look at the photo) in the top row of seats next to Ruth Graves, and Martha and Katrien are immediately below her.





