

Notre-Dame du Saint-Désert Monastery

November 5, 2022

Dear friends,

Many of you have prayed for us since our last General Chapter in November 2021 which marked an important step in the life of our monastic family. Therefore, we want to take stock and share with you the main advances that have been made since that Chapter.

They relate mainly to the implementation of our Constitutions, the formation of prioresses and formators, and the canonical visits, all within the context of the decisions of the General Chapter and the recommendations of the listening cell.

One of the first acts of the 2021 Chapter was the handing over to Rome in January 2022 of the Constitutions approved by the sisters participating in the Chapter.

In June, the Dicastery of Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life authorized the implementation of these Constitutions for three years and informed the Permanent Council of the adjustments still needed.

Since the General Chapter, the formation of prioresses and formators in each monastery has been insured thanks to the teaching of competent persons in monthly meetings by videoconference on such themes as synodality, subsidiarity, interculturality, listening, and discernment. These teachings are then being shared with the whole community in view of their progressive integration in our life.

A session brought together all the novice sisters and their prioresses or formators at the monastery of Montsvoirons last August with teachings by sisters and external speakers: a Dominican Father, a Bishop of the Coptic Orthodox Church and a psychotherapist. In the framework of this 10-day session, the sisters responsible for the novices also received a formation in accompaniment. Nine monasteries were visited this past year. These canonical visits took place primarily in the monasteries in which the mandate of the prioresses was ending: the monasteries of Paris, Mougères and Pugny in France, Italy, Argentina, Spain, Lithuania, the United States and Canada. These canonical visits will continue after the Council ends on November 6.

Last June, at the monastery of Notre-Dame de Clémence in La Verne, the outgoing prioresses

benefited from a theological session by a Dominican Father, and from an accompaniment for this new stage in their journey by a Benedictine emeritus mother abbess.

From October 22 to November 6, 2022, we met as a Council at the Motherhouse Notre Dame du Saint Desert, with the 7 members of the Permanent Council, the 28 prioresses of the monasteries and our two apostolic assistants, Father Jean Quris and Mother Geneviève Barrière.

The recently elected prioresses gave the Council assembly a renewed face, in an atmosphere of spontaneous exchanges.

During this Council, we began the work of adjusting the Constitutions as requested by the Dicastery. For this purpose, our two sisters with degrees in Canon Law transmitted to the assembly the teaching offered by this Dicastery concerning the link between Charism and Institution, and the Charism of the founder. This teaching was the basis for a common reflection on the Charism of the Family, also held in common with our brothers, the monks of Bethlehem, who were holding their Council at their monastery in Currière-en-Chartreuse. This reflection will be continued in a synodal manner in each community.

A work on the teaching of Father Amedeo Cencini, fdcc, emphasized the need to qualify formation at all stages of monastic life from entry to old age. A sharing of experiences in different monasteries enriched this work.

The back and forth of exchanges in small groups and in assembly allowed each sister to express herself freely in an atmosphere of attentive listening.

In order to continue our journey of conversion in relation to our dysfunctions already highlighted, a professional from the Institut Talenthéo gave a two-day session on the relational responsibility in the duty of a prioress.

Numerous avenues for work at the level of government and accompaniment were received.

The work of this Council will continue through a living transmission and a common reflection involving each of our communities and each of our sisters.

We are deeply grateful to the Church and to the persons who are helping us to pursue this path of conversion and renewal. We are well aware that the task is not completed.

With great hope, we entrust ourselves to your prayer.

The Council of Prioresses of Bethlehem.