



## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT THE SISTERS

**1. What does it mean to be a nun?**

Nuns are women who commit themselves to seeking God in a radically pure and intense way through imitating Jesus Christ. Above all, we follow His way of obedience and humility, chastity, poverty, and prayer; and the motive for this life is both His love for us and our love for Him.

**2. What is contemplative monastic life?**

Contemplative monastic life has a long history among Christians. As the persecutions in the early Church subsided, many faithful longed to bear witness to Christ in a way as radical as the red martyrdom of blood. These embraced what came to be known as the white martyrdom: a life dedicated to God through prayer and penance. Although this vocation has had different outward expressions through the centuries, it is most often lived according to vows, in community, under an established rule of life.

**3. What is the history and charism of the Cistercian Order?**

In 1098, a small group of Benedictine monks in France decided to form a new community where they could live their vows more fervently. They built a new monastery at Citeaux (in Latin, *Cistercium*), and as they grew over time, founded many more monasteries all over Europe. The Order now has houses all over the world.

With its Benedictine spirituality, the Cistercian Order has always embraced a simple but intense liturgy, hard manual labor and a sincere search for God through deep personal, contemplative prayer.

**4. What do you do all day?**

Essentially, we pray and we work. Beginning at 3:30 each morning, our days alternate between times of communal liturgy (consisting of seven periods of chanting the Psalms and other prayers in Latin), private prayer and reading, work, and recreation, all flowing from and leading to the daily celebration of the Mass. To support ourselves, we make and sell altar bread for Holy Communion, which we send to parishes across the country; we also engage in the daily work of maintaining our home.

**5. Do you take a vow of silence?**

We do not take a vow of silence. We do live in silence, however, speaking only during specific times of recreation or as necessary to accomplish our work in the monastery.

Following the Benedictine tradition, the vows we take are those of obedience, of stability (commitment to our monastic community), and of the monastic way of life (*conversatio morum* – often translated as conversion).

**6. How many sisters belong to your community? What are your backgrounds?**

There are 22 in our community, ranging in age from 23 to 89. Our median age is 47. We have come to the monastery from all over the USA as well as a few other countries, including Mexico, Brazil, the Philippines and Canada.

We all have different backgrounds and talents. Some of us never graduated from college; others hold bachelor's or master's degrees in a wide range of subjects, such as nursing, chemistry, entomology, mathematics, art and computer science.

**7. How does God use your life and talents in the hiddenness of the monastery?**

The Lord knows how best to use the gifts He gives His children, and nothing ever goes to waste when we follow His will. He has drawn us all together, with our different backgrounds and talents, for a reason. Sometimes He asks us to let go of a particular activity in order to purify our intentions and allow us to love Him for Himself instead of for His gifts. But He also uses the gifts He has given us in ways more rich and rewarding than we could ever have imagined, for our own good and that of our sisters and all His people.

Even though we also give up the possibility of the intimacy and joy of marriage and family life, in prayer we enter into a real relationship with the Lord as our Spouse and experience His love as a gift beyond our wildest dreams. Although we do not often see or hear of the effects in the world of our prayer and relationship with God, we know by faith, and sometimes through the testimony of others, that our life of sacrifice truly does bear fruit, in graces of conversion and healing and growth in charity for all His people.

**8. How is life in the monastery not simply a flight from the world, with its pain and duties and burdens?**

To draw close to our Lord is to draw close to all the pain and suffering of His children, the pain that He Himself endured on the Cross. Our prayer does not separate us from our brothers and sisters; rather, it allows us to enter into deeper communion with all who suffer, as we bring them with us in an intentional way before our Lord.

While it may seem that we are fleeing the responsibilities of family life and work, our life in the monastery is by no means an escape from all that it means to be fallen humans in a fallen world. Although we strive to free ourselves from many distractions, we too labor to earn our living; we too take care of our home and surroundings; we too have the responsibility of nurturing our spiritual children by embracing a deep life of prayer, a life that demands many sacrifices.

**9. What is enclosure? Is it not in some way a rejection of your family and friends?**

Enclosure is a means we embrace in order to focus more intensely on God alone. By living in a strictly designated space, with fewer distractions, contacts and activities, we can open our minds and our hearts more completely to God. Learning to relate to our family members and friends in a different and more spiritual way, we come to love them more truly and purely in the God who is the Father and Creator of all.

We do communicate with our family and friends to a limited degree; our families may also visit us once a year. Apart from that, however, we remain with them primarily through our union in the Mystical Body of Christ, a foretaste of heaven, where we hope to praise and worship God together, forever.

**10. What does your vocation have to do with me?**

Because we are all called to seek God in our various states of life, we are all fundamentally united. As St. Paul points out, no part of the body can say to another that it has no need of it; all work together and help each other. To use a somewhat familiar image to describe our particular vocation, the life of prayer in the Church is like the heart in a body. Without the heart, the other functions would cease; at the same time, without the nourishment and support the other members provide, the heart cannot function either. When each one does his part in the Kingdom of God, the whole body is healthy and can fulfill its function in peace and joy.