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La Trappe Abbey in Normandy, France, is seen in an undated photograph. The monks announced that they may leave their monastery in 2028 — a move that could bring to an end 900 years of Cistercian monastic presence in Soligny-la-Trappe, formerly known as "La Grande Trappe." (OSV News photo/Courtesy of La Trappe Abbey Facebook page)

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Paris — March 12, 2026

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The monks of La Trappe Abbey in Normandy may leave their monastery in 2028, the abbey announced — a move that could bring to an end 900 years of Cistercian monastic presence in Soligny-la-Trappe, formerly known as "La Grande Trappe."

While the news of the iconic monastery allegedly closing traveled the internet world at a viral speed, the monks said in a March 5 press release that the "Abbey of La Trappe did not close and is not sold," adding that "contrary to popular noises, the brothers are always there, faithful to prayer and work, and activities ... going on as usual."

The Trappist community did admit, however, that "following a long discernment" and "given the scarcity of vocation and the heavier burden of land heritage," the brothers "are considering a departure in 2028."

"Reflections are underway with other communities to find solutions that are more suitable, economically and spiritually relevant. The context is harsh, for several decades already, and many other abbeys have already changed hands," the Trappist French community said, underlining that "If this isn't a disaster, it's obviously a history page that's about to be turned."

Soligny-la-Trappe Abbey was founded in the 12th century by Count Rotrou III in memory of his wife, Mathilde, granddaughter of William the Conqueror, Duke of Normandy, who became king of England in 1066.

The abbey gained notoriety in the 17th century, when Abbot Armand de Rancé undertook a reform of the Cistercian order there, beginning in 1662, to restore the original simplicity and austerity of the Cistercians, based on the rule of St. Benedict. Since then, Cistercian monks have commonly been called Trappists — Order of Cistercians of the Strict Observance.

Today, there are only a dozen monks left in a monastery that was once designed to accommodate a hundred.

In France, many once-flourishing monastic communities are now seeing their numbers decline rapidly. In November 2025, a survey by the Catholic daily newspaper La Croix indicated that between 2000 and 2023, the number of monks and nuns in France fell from 66,000 to 22,000, and could fall below 10,000 by 2045.

This rapid decline is leading to the closure of two to three monasteries or convents per month, on average. Expensive to maintain, they are not suited to the religious, whose average age is now, according to La Croix, 79 for women and 69 for men.

Trappists are particularly affected by this situation. In late spring 2024, those from Oelenberg Abbey in Alsace, near the German border, left their 11th-century abbey to join other communities. There were only eight of them left, compared to 200 at the beginning of the 20th century.

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In October 2025, the last six Trappist monks of Notre-Dame du Port-du-Salut, between Brittany and Normandy, also left their abbey, enriched with 800 years of history, which was entrusted to the Diocese of Laval.

In November 2025, a little further south, in the Nantes area, 13 Trappists left the Abbey of Bellefontaine, to disperse to other communities. But in this case, monastic life at the abbey will resume. In the summer of 2026, a dozen monks from the young Abbey of Sainte-Madeleine du Barroux will take over. Founded in 1970 in Provence, in the south of France, this new Benedictine abbey was intended for around 40

monks, who follow the Tridentine liturgy. Today, there are around 60 monks, and they need space. At Bellefontaine, they too will follow the rule of St. Benedict.

But the Cistercian order has not yet had its final say in France, seeing revival in some places. In September 2022, the last Trappists left their monumental monastery in the Massif Central, the famed upland region in south-central France.

Commonly known as La Trappe de Notre-Dame des Neiges, it was where St. Charles de Foucauld entered in 1890, after his conversion — and before leaving for the Middle East. But two months after their departure, in December 2022, eight nuns from the dynamic Cistercian community of Boulaur, located in the south of the country, near Spain, arrived to take over. Much younger, they have already welcomed new vocations since their arrival.

Similarly, the Catholic magazine *Famille Chrétienne* devoted a report March 6 to the Cistercian Abbey of Tamié, located in the heart of the Alps, in Savoie, near Italy.

"After years without any new arrivals, the Abbey of Tamié is seeing a revival of vocations," the Catholic magazine wrote, referring to "something completely new." "With fewer than thirty brothers, the Abbey has had several new arrivals since 2024, including three postulants in their thirties who are recent converts."

As for Soligny-la-Trappe, the monks do not yet know what the future holds for their community or their abbey. On March 9, the Diocese of Séez, to which they belong, published a statement inviting people to pray for them at this stage of their journey, referring to "their influence extending far beyond the diocese."

In their March 5 press release, the Trappist community wrote: "The departure of the brothers, very demanding and painful for them, will not be without upsetting all those attached to the community, sometimes for generations."

"The beautiful season will be this year again for guided tours led by the brothers. They are counting on your understanding and support during this important step in their journey," they added.