



SUPERIOR GENERAL  
CONGREGATION OF THE  
PRIESTS OF THE SACRED HEART  
Dehonians

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## **Consecration, ministry and community: our journey**

*Letter for March 14,  
on the anniversary of the birth of Fr. Leo John Dehon*

*To the members of the Congregation  
To all the Members of the Dehonian Family*

On December 19, 2018, we celebrated the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the priestly ordination of Fr. Leo Dehon. In the Christmas letter that we sent you, we referred to this anniversary in these terms: “his ministry in the Church was a continuous learning to walk with others and for others.” As we approach the day of his birth, we wish to seize another opportunity to renew our thanks to God for the gift of Fr. Dehon’s life, vocation and ministry.

In his continuous desire to learn, we recognize his constant willingness to understand and live God's will, his great passion. On this new anniversary, we deem it appropriate to highlight that the priestly ministry that he received did not mean, for Fr. Dehon, the fulfilment of his desire to seek God's will. In fact, our Founder did not limit himself to living that conformist clericalism that even today, as then, lurks behind every corner. On the contrary, he felt called to go deeper into the dynamics of the baptismal grace that had bound him forever to the Trinitarian life.

After he became aware of his intimacy with the Lord, of the merits and limitations of the Church in which he lived, as well as the political, social and economic challenges of those times, he realised that the Lord, whom he so loved to please, called him to religious life. How beneficial it is for us to contemplate the vocational dynamic that has taken place in the life of our Founder! An inner journey enabled him to integrate vocation, ministry and community. Only after much prayer and discernment, and encouraged by the many illustrious men and women of his time to whom he humbly turned for advice and guidance, did he understand that God was calling him to share a journey of faith with the others, inspired by the profound contemplation of the pierced Heart of the Saviour. This is the origin of the *Oblates*, Priests of the Heart of Jesus.

We must recognize that our personal itinerary and religious consecration acquire greater identity and meaning insofar as we discover Fr. Dehon's vocational itinerary. Along his journey, he developed his heart of a father and brother within him. Today, we live our consecration to God through religious life, as priests or brothers, and must continue to embrace the indispensable lymph that is the charismatic patrimony that was given to us.

There is no doubt that we are aware that on many occasions the good development of our vocational journey is affected by the way in which we respond to the needs, tasks and compromises that we come across in the ecclesial reality, and the society or even by our strictly personal interests. In the face of such emergencies, we must be vigilant so that our identity is not reduced to a mere ministerial or professional function. If this were the case, we would risk depriving the Church of the genuine vocation that we have received in order to live our religious life.

In this sense, we must remember that twenty-five years ago the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life published "Fraternal life in Community". Over the years, this document has helped many religious communities to renew themselves and to focus on what is asked of them for the life of the Church:

Experts in communion, religious are, therefore, called to be an ecclesial community in the Church and in the world, witnesses and architects of the plan for unity which is the crowning point of human history in God's design. Above all, by profession of the evangelical counsels, which frees one from what might be an obstacle to the fervour of charity, religious are communally a prophetic sign of intimate union with God, who is loved above all things. Furthermore, through the daily experience of communion of life, prayer and apostolate - the essential and distinctive elements of their form of consecrated life - they are "a sign of fraternal fellowship" (VFC 10).

If we read this text anew, we can notice how the Spirit incessantly urges us to incarnate what it has given us in our Dehonian charism here and now. May our daily oblation, expressed in words and deeds, be a sincere declaration and distinctive trait of our shared availability in proclaiming the Gospel:

The religious are often identified by the colour of their garments; the garment of our soul before God must be love and if there were two, the second would be compassion. There is no Oblate without this; this is absolutely necessary (*Cahiers Falleur* 1/48).

We hope that you shall celebrate this new anniversary joyfully and profoundly. May this encourage us to journey together and may the Lord grant us the grace of vocations that are eager to continue to walk along the path traced by Fr. Dehon.

In the Heart of Christ,

Fr. Carlos Luis Suárez Codorniú, scj  
Superior General  
and Council