



FINAL MESSAGE OF THE IX GENERAL CONFERENCE TO THE SCJ CONGREGATION AND THE DEHONIAN FAMILY

"The kingdom of the Heart of Jesus in society is the kingdom of justice, charity, mercy, and compassion for the lowly, the humble, and those who suffer. I am asking you to dedicate yourselves to all these works, to encourage them and to support them. Promote all institutions which contribute to the kingdom of social justice and defend the weak against oppression by the powerful".

(Fr. Dehon, RSC 610)

Dear brothers, members of the Dehonian Family and friends who share our life and work.

From February 13th to 18th 2022, we gathered in Rome for a General Conference with the theme: "Dehonians in Social Commitments: The Impact of God's Love for Our Society".

We had the opportunity to listen, reflect and share thoughts and hopes. Once again we were given the chance to experience the beauty of being together in the richness of the variety of cultures from which we come and in the unity of the charism we share.

We would now like to share with you the reflections and the lines of action that have emerged during these days, knowing full well that the richness of the life of Dehonians already engaged in numerous activities in the social field cannot be described in a few lines.

SULLE ORME DI PADRE DEHON...

1. "Our work must continue" (Fr. Dehon, LCC 8090139/48). It is according to these words that the IX General Conference has undertaken to follow in the footsteps of Fr. Dehon: continue the work he began, his initiatives and his sensitivity in the field of social commitment. The three objectives of the Conference (IL pg. 3) were taken up and developed in *two directions*:

- An inspirational one: to disseminate that beatitude that is born of the relationship with the Son of Man who is the one who lives and expresses what is truly human (cf. Lk 6:20-23) and who did not allow himself to be seduced by the inhuman,

but, on the contrary, experienced a penetrating love for life and a passion for human dignity.

- A practical one: to see and make our presence felt with Jesus and in the style of Jesus, according to the charism left us by Fr. Dehon, on the plain (of the men and women of today) after having been on the mountain (of contemplation and primordial experience).
2. The assembly sessions, through presentations, videos and sharing, confirmed that the *spirituality of the Sacred Heart*, as lived by **Fr. Dehon**, is manifested and incarnated in ecclesial and social commitment. Fr. Dehon had formed himself and had developed a lively awareness and capacity for openness in order to be able to interpret the situation of his time, with qualified readings and analysis, in an evangelical way. This was not always mirrored by the history and experience of the Congregation, which has encountered resistance and negative interpretation. In spite of this resistance, many confreres have followed the charismatic intuition of Fr. Dehon and have committed themselves to being present in the social sphere. Our tribute goes out to all of them, especially to the many who today still share the joy of service to the humble.
 3. Confronting the *Word of God* leads us to reinforce the identity of what is human and comes from the Creator in a world that challenges it because of choices and ideologies that seem to destroy the human fabric. Thus, our choices are rooted in the love that makes us reach toward the stature of Christ in reparation according to our Constitutions (Cst. 23) and forces us to be transformed in order to transform, to be repaired in order to repair. In this way adoration becomes the space to place ourselves before the Lord who inspires us in our action, making this time the culmination of the effectiveness to which we can aspire.
 4. Re-reading the *Church's social teaching*, we have become aware that social commitment is rooted in the example of Jesus of Nazareth himself, who spent his ministry doing good and healing every person from illness. Following his example, concern for the poor has been a constant element in the practice of the Church since its origins. The Fathers of the Church never tire of emphasizing the necessity and priority of caring for the poor. At the center of our attention, then, is the human person, for whom God has come among us, whose humanity he has taken on. Real humanity has the faces and wounds of the people we meet along the way.
 5. In recent years, the *pontifical magisterium* has broadened the horizon in the perspective of the integral development of the human person. This attention is not new to us, because Fr. Dehon always proposed work on all the constituent dimensions of the human person: social, economic, personal, relational, transcendent, and religious. So does Pope Francis in *Laudato Si'* and *Fratelli tutti*, which deal with the integral development of the human person, the ecological dimension, and care for our common home. The new ethical anthropology that emerges from these documents by Pope Francis makes us understand that wounds and frailty are an integral part of the human person.
 6. In this light, we emphasize that our concern and "social action" is not limited to specific and restricted actions but includes the whole richness of our relationships with others, with the

world and with God. Thus, we reaffirm that at the heart of our concern is the desire to promote the *integral development of the person and of the human community* in which we live.

7. ***Our attitudes*** are to be marked by a warm welcome, unbiased, attentive listening, friendly dedication to others, a lively effort to rebuild interrupted or broken human relationships, personalities destroyed by addiction or a failed past. In this way, we stand by people, making their ability to live life in freedom and dignity flourish again, without becoming slaves to prejudice or condemnation.
8. Awareness of some ***Dehonian social works*** has allowed us to bring out the values that sustain them: welcoming, love that repairs and re-creates, offering spirituality, oblation love, caring, not just doing good but doing it WITH love. In fact, the answer to the question: "How to be prophets of love and servants of reconciliation today?" is by getting together and doing things not only FOR others but WITH others, integrating the recipients of our actions into a virtuous circle that promotes them as protagonists of change. Because loving is our mission... and the source of our joy. This also allows us to understand how our attention and action have the capacity to trigger paths of rebirth, reactivate the reality on which we act, and give rise to a relational and transforming future. Our living out and transmitting the love we have received from God underpins our action and opens up the way for everyone to feel loved, while respecting cultural differences.
9. In this process we highlight the effort to create ***synergies*** between the Congregation and other realities: religious congregations, lay movements, churches, and other associations, while creating a ***fraternal collaboration*** in projects of regenerative and integral reparation. This opens up the possibility for us not to merely promote but also to collaborate in projects originating from other areas, bringing to them our Dehonian style and charism.
10. This journey demands that we assume the ***style of the "faithful Servant"***: the faithful Son, servant of the Father (Heb. 3-4), and therefore worthy of trust. This call is to be faithful to the Gospel and faithful to the legacy of Fr. Dehon. Indeed, the Heart of Christ is also pierced, made fragile, and wounded. From this also flows the ethic of social friendship, where the faithful and prudent servant becomes a friend, refusing to become an idol of himself. There we find the source of love/charity: he loved us unto death, even to the death of the cross. Thus we rediscover the movement of the keywords of our spiritual experience: reparation, salvation, forgiveness, resurrection. Then we will be able to look at the other as a brother or sister, even when they are marked by limitations and errors, wounds and defeats. Only in this way, because His way is our way (cf. Cst. 12), will we be worthy of the trust placed in us.
11. We have thus rediscovered the beauty of living ***reparation*** as a source of joy for the experience of the salvation received and then offered to others. It is the life and gestures of Jesus that offer a new perspective, new potential, and new beginning.

For this reason:

- we feel that we are not simply "social workers", but that in social service, given in order to promote paths of change, in an evangelical spirit and in the style of the Founder, we fully express our being Dehonians;

- we live reparation in our social commitment, basing it on a dialogical anthropology that does not forget the wounds that form us, but proposes a path of relational re-generation activating the immense possibilities of the human person. The style to be adopted is that of Jesus who related to everyone without ever condemning anyone;
- we understand that social attention is not simply doing, but a how-to, because it is a "mental and affective map" that comes from contemplation of the pierced Heart;
- in the footsteps of Fr. Dehon, we reaffirm that our social commitment will promote integral human development, rooted in the notion of human dignity.

... SOME PROPOSALS AND GUIDELINES TO PUT INTO ACTION

- a. Achieve a *vital synthesis* between the spiritual dimension and social commitment in our vocation as Dehonian religious, recognizing the "clerical" readings of our charism as inadequate. There is an urgent need to acquire the ability to merge doctrine-spirituality-action.
- b. It will be important to succeed in creating a network to stimulate and facilitate collaboration within the Congregation at all levels, first of all because we continue to know little of what is being done in the different Entities. Then, weave *networks of collaboration* with people who are sensitive to projects aimed at promoting the human person instead of works-structures, initiating processes of conversion to collaboration with the laity while respecting their space for witness and action. There is a need to be open to cooperation with other forces (ecclesial and non-ecclesial) working in the field of social justice, fraternity and peace, service to the poor, and ecology.
- c. Acknowledging that very often difficulties emerge at the level of our cooperation with confreres, the need to increase the *community dimension* of social commitment emerges, avoiding individualism and personal protagonism. The way forward is to entrust communities, in communion with the project of the Entity and the Congregation, with the task of discerning their social commitment projects: accompanying the project's origin, purifying it from the beginning, taking it on as one's own, and supporting those who are capable of carrying it out. This requires placing fraternity at the center, educating our hearts in the contemplation of the pierced Heart, and acquiring the sentiments of Christ.
- d. We highlight the need to study and deepen our *knowledge of the figure of Father Dehon*. Knowing full well that we cannot copy his concrete actions, we adopt his attitudes of openness, and a deepening sensitivity to the problems of society. We are thus called to open our minds so that, as early as the time of formation, creativity is promoted as it occurred with Fr. Dehon, who gave answers to the concrete realities of his time, and took risks by committing himself without waiting for pre-conceived recipes.
- e. As Dehonians we are called to identify the poverties and what is lacking in our social fabric, wherever we find ourselves operating, and to see the concrete faces of the poor, who need responses that are not only charitable, but for us to propose and work with them towards a dignified and more stable future. For this reason, we extend an invitation to create *circles of knowledge*, reflection, and application of the Social Doctrine of the

Church, building a **Dehonian social methodology** that includes all the values of our spirituality and the richness of our charism, and allows us to adequately interpret and perhaps advance the social fabric of our common home. It is urgent to prepare ourselves to have the necessary tools to read, interpret and respond to the signs of the times, avoiding cultural models that are ill adapted and out of context. There are cultural gaps that deserve attention.

- f. A useful tool is a rigorous, serious and quality presence on **social media**, to be promoters of a new sensitivity that activates social change, facilitates connection within the Congregation, and helps us to collaborate in a common mission.
- g. In order to be able to understand and internalize the new anthropology of *Fratelli tutti* and *Laudato Si'* and to keep alive the style of Jesus, we feel that **ongoing formation** is necessary, to lead all of us to an "apostolic conversion" and to foster the growth of a person's potential at all levels. Above all this unifies us with a spirituality that forms us within. Specific formation is useful if it is internalized by the person in harmony with the other aspects.
- h. As we encourage the apostolate of Dehonians who are committed in the social field, we realize the importance of the **initial formation** of the younger generations. We see the urgency of rethinking our formative environments so that our *formandi*, generally sensitive to social issues, may live this ideal of regenerative reparation in a changing world. We believe in the need to encourage and stimulate experiences of social commitment in the formation communities, accompanied and evaluated in the formation environment.
- i. It is within this dynamic that we believe it would be appropriate to **give new life to the former Justice and Peace Commissions**, updating their focus to include Integral Human Development, which also encompasses the integral ecology themes announced in *Laudato Si'*, by using the instruments of the *Laudato Si' Platform* (<https://laudatosiactionplatform.org>). We can enrich ourselves thanks to this new awareness that makes us see the reality of the situations in which we live, weaving connections with our charism, and initiating good eco-friendly practices.

Conclusion

In these days of fraternal sharing we have seen and heard how we Dehonians wish to respond to the challenges raised by the environment in which we live. Responses are very different, depending on the situations which our entities and communities are a part of. But what inspires and unites all these initiatives is the same concern: restoring dignity to wounded persons and communities in a society that ignores or discards them.

Thus, in this effort and service, in the style of Father Dehon and for the good of persons and communities, we want to continue the work of Christ who called us to undertake his mission of love and reparation as servants and friends, collaborating with him so that "they may have life, and have it to the full" (Jn 10:10).

Rome, 18th February 2022

The participants in the IX General Conference