



Rome, 20.12.2001

Prot. N. 263/2001

To all the Members of
the Dehonian Family
(SCJs, Consecrated & Lay)

Dear brothers and sisters,

The XX General Chapter (1977) of the Priests of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, with Motion No.1, asked for the elaboration of a “Document in which is defined, in general sense, the characteristics that constitute the Dehonian Laity.”

The study of this topic had been commended to the members of the Dehonian Family. These, in their October meeting of 2001 in Rome, approved some “Conclusive Proposals” with the request of elaborating a “Final Document” on the Dehonian Family and on the Dehonian Laity, using both the “Proposals” and the “Working Document.”

The “Final Document”, written by some members of the Dehonian Family, is composed of two texts: the first, on the Dehonian Family, as a constitutive paper, or better, a “communion paper”; the second is on the Dehonian Laity, as a statute, or better as “Life proposal.”

Famiglia Dehoniana
Carta di Comunione


These “conclusive proposals” have been taken up in their entirety in both texts: parts of the “Work Document” have been used to complete the document on Dehonian Laity in its various aspects; furthermore, to situate the Dehonian Family in its present ecclesial and theological context, as something new under the sun, use has been made of the document “Presentation of the Topic” prepared by Fr. General for that October 2000 meeting. Lastly, the text on “Lay Dehonians” has been furnished with references to the apostolic exhortation “Christifideles Laici”.

These final documents were presented to the Provincial, Regional and District Superiors, in their meeting in Rome, November 2001, and were positively evaluated. And now, the General Administration, having revisited the text and included the suggestions put forward, is now publicizing it to the whole Congregation sending it to the different components of the Dehonian Family.

The text on “Lay Dehonians” is complementary to the one on the “Dehonian Family”, from which it derives its inspiration and directives. And now, the different groups of “Lay Dehonians” have, at their disposition a basic official document to which they can refer when they compile or revisit their statutes at the national or geographical area level. The Major Superiors as well as all other religious can find in these orientations, a guide for the animation and relationships with the Dehonian Family and the Lay Dehonians.

It is a wish that this first step be a help in following the way of communion in the Dehonian Family, in promoting an autonomous participation, always characterized and direct to the charism of Fr. Dehon.

I greet you all in the heart of Christ.



Fr. Virginio D. Bressanelli, scj and the General Council
of the Priests of the Sacred Heart of Jesus

THE DEHONIAN FAMILY “The Communion Charter”

I. A New Event

1. The Dehonian Family, understood as a whole made up of separate components (SCJ, Consecrated, Lay) taking its inspiration from the spiritual venture of Fr. Dehon as his response to a **personal call and mission** in the Church, is a reality today.

This much was made obvious already 10 years ago at the meeting of 1990: we were made officially aware of the **communion of different vocations** in the **sharing of Fr. Dehon’s plan of evangelical life**.

At the meeting of 2000 we also came to an awareness of establishing a **single family** in so far as we are participants of the same **Dehonian heritage**.

In a certain sense, even though in differing proportions and ways, this fact had its origins from the very first years of Fr. Dehon.

From the beginning of the SCJ foundation (1878), there was participation by both priests and lay persons, associates and members¹, a situation that Fr. Dehon frequently spoke about even to the point of mentioning it in reports to the Holy See when he sought approbation of the Institute (1887, 1892) and in the closing letter of the 8th General Chapter (1919).

¹ Already from the beginning, Fr. Dehon wanted to associate and aggregate lay men and women into the Congregation who would share his spirituality and mission by enrolling the lay women into the Institute of *Sister Servants* and the lay men into the *Oblates of the Heart of Jesus*. “*Associates*” made up the mass of those who participated in the spirituality and goals of the Institute; “*Aggregates*” made up those who were committed to live the spirituality of love and reparation more intimately, offering themselves as victims of immolation.

The “fact” of the Dehonian Family was not something new, though today it has taken on its own characteristics which mean for us a new reality, a new happening.

2. We mean some widespread phenomenon that is taking place in many religious orders and congregations. The Holy Father in the exhortation *Vita Consecrata* stated: *a new chapter, rich in hope, has begun in the history of relations between consecrated persons and the laity* (n. 54) marked by *new experiences of communion and cooperation* (that) *should be encouraged...* (n. 55).

3. At its origins the grace, stimulus, and Christological and ecclesiological perspectives from Vatican Council II are to be found: the vision of the Church as the People of God, with a call to holiness derived from baptism that inserts it into the Pascal mystery of Christ; a pilgrim people with duties in the world and in history, in a communion of charity with all its members...*In Church Communion the states of life, by being ordered one to the other, are thus bound together among themselves...and whether taken collectively or individually in relation to the others, are at the service of the Church's growth. While different in expression they are deeply united in the Church's "mystery of communion" and are dynamically coordinated in its unique mission.* (CL n. 55).

It is evidence that, before the beginning of any kind of vocational differencing, it is necessary

- a. to affirm **the unity of the mission which makes the Church a “people on mission,” a “people of those who are sent”**
- b. to recall **a common call to holiness, to union with God for the salvation of the world.**

This unification and coordination does not do away with **the proper identity, specificity, and organizational autonomy of each state or vocation.**

4. Founders' charism, understood not as an exclusive property of the Institutes but as a **gift of the Spirit to the entire Church**, by their very nature open themselves to a number of forms of participation in the different states of life.

In the complementarities of the vocations **partakers of the common heredity**, the Founder's charism shows its richness in the Church and meantime, reaches its full expansion.

5. The Founder has a special gift of grasping the fullness of the charism, of living it out as though by anticipation, to offer it to the church as "*a plan of gospel life*" which goes beyond the confines of the Institute that he founded.

In this sense he is truly "spiritual father" even when the charism, spanning time, inherits and finds expression in new forms till now unthinkable; forms that afterwards are recognized as authentic and approved by the church.

The charism is a dynamic reality, all the richer and more beautiful the more free it is to create new arrangements and to bring new styles of life and apostolate into existence.

6. Sharing in the same project of evangelical life of Fr. Dehon and **participation** in the same heritage make us **one family**.

Family stands for:

- a. one community of differing vocations (SCJ, consecrated, lay) who share the same patrimony or legacy;
- b. related components which participate in the same charismatic project of Fr. Dehon, each in turn completing the other, with reinforcement of the individual vocation and specific mission that each has from the same commonly held spirituality;
- c. participation as brothers and sisters in the same spirituality; thus fraternal relationships and not subordinated ones.

We share **the same form of approaching the mystery of Christ, but not necessarily the concrete forms that express it.**

We participate all together in the **charismatic mission** of “establishing His Reign in individuals and in society” but the **apostolic works** that make up this mission differ in so far as they correspond to the proper identity of each single component and are actuated in the specific spheres of each vocation.

7. The term “Family” refers not only to **what is held in common** given by the founding grace from the Holy Spirit, but also to a common “founding father,” to a **“common spiritual Father”**: **Fr. Dehon.**

He is seen as the church’s mediator of this gift from the Spirit; he is the guide that leads us to Christ.

The Spirit is the true central character of any charism: we need not wonder that, in the mediation of Fr. Dehon, Mother Mary-Oliva Ulrich played a part with the *Sister Servants of the Heart of Jesus* and Mother Mary-Veronica (Caroline Lioger) did as well with the *Religious of the Heart of Jesus*; nor should we wonder if, in the historical evolution of this reality, meaningful mediation will come about that will lead to the birth of new components and expressions of the charism.

8. The “Dehonian Family” is a living yet developing reality:

- it is the fruit of an initiative of the Spirit which continues to surprise us with its creativity;
- this is a challenge which confronts us.

For SCJs:

- This is a grace which is given to strengthen our own identity and the sense of belonging to our Institute, to help us discover new prospects and ultimately to make a more profound examination of our charism;

- It is a challenge that invites us to joyfully accept the new brothers and sisters that the Lord gives us.

The center is not the SCJ Institute, but the “**undertaking of Dehonian gospel living**” in which we participate: **the charism of Fr. Dehon** which we have inherited.

9. A minimum of institutionalization and wise organization are fundamental so that every life venture have a future.

Life precedes law and norms: we wanted to wait a few years before beginning a codification of the relations among the components of the Dehonian Family and drawing up an identity profile of the “Family” and the “Lay Dehonian” with factual data as our source: we are all adult children, with organizational autonomy, having a state of life recognized by the church (religious, consecrated laity, lay persons) in which we are called to live the charismatic experience of Fr. Dehon.

II. Lines of Direction

A. Charism: Spirituality and Mission

10. As a gift and grace from the Spirit to the entire church, the **charism of Fr. Dehon** consists in that founding inspiration-intuition of the mystery of Christ that constituted his faith experience and according to which he responded to the pastoral needs of the church and to the challenges of his era.

The faith experience of Fr. Dehon that constitutes **the heritage of the Dehonian Family** is expressed in spirituality and in mission.

11. Dehonian Spirituality is marked by some fundamental elements like the following:

- a. the centrality of the mystery of the Heart of Christ, as love and revealer of the Father’s love; a love rejected through sin;
- b. participation in the oblation of Christ, in the Eucharistic celebration and adoration, sharing His sentiments for the Father

and for mankind and cooperating in the building up of a civilization of love;

c. welcoming the Virgin Mary as an model of availability in faith;

d. thinking for the church, sharing its passion for preaching the gospel, its commitment to justice, truth, solidarity, learning...

e. being prophets of love and servants of reconciliation, being attentive to mankind's appeals (promotion of human dignity, peace, universal fraternity).

All these elements come together in a personal **style of life**, characterized by the union in Christ and by the attentive and heartfelt welcome of persons, by the full insertion in the reality of one's context and in the human history. This in turn gives orientation to the mission of the church particularly by specializing in the preaching of a merciful and compassionate God, in giving witness to the love and tenderness of God manifested in the human heart of Christ. It harkens back to visible signs like eucharistic adoration, reparative oblation, cult of the Heart of Jesus, the recollection of Fr. Dehon...all of which serve to reveal its proper identity.

12. The Dehonian Mission requires that:

a. *"the Reign of the Heart of Jesus be established in souls and in societies"* inspired and motivated by our characteristic spirituality;

b. collaboration in the establishment of this Reign through prayer, and concrete actions for persons, the church, society at the level of the local church;

c. openness to any likely pastoral collaboration with the other components of the Dehonian Family.

The Dehonian mission is open to a variety of concrete formalizations and is not identified with any single apostolic activity.

13. Animated by the Spirit, the Dehonian Family is called to **live** this heritage in its **daily life**, each member according to its

proper state of life, each with his/her own tasks whether they are personal, communal, spiritual or social.

B. The Dehonian Family: Identity²

14. Sharing in the faith experience and charism of Fr. Dehon is a **grace** and personal **vocation** that SCJs, laity, and consecrated men and women live.

15. Sharing in the same heritage defines us in the church as members of the **Dehonian Family**: we accept each other in reciprocity and we acknowledge that we are brothers and sisters. It is the charism of Fr. Dehon that marks us as “Dehonians” in the church and in the world.

16. The **components** of the Dehonian Family are:

a. *The Priests of the Sacred Heart of Jesus*: religious, consecrated with votes in an apostolic institute, living the charism of Fr. Dehon in its spirituality and mission and having its own constitutions;

b. *Lay Dehonians*: those who live their baptismal commitment according to the lay vocation and mission the source of which is the spirituality of Fr. Dehon

c. *Some Institutes of consecrated life*, who, by the mediation of the founders, acknowledge that the roots of their charism are linked to the evangelical plan of life of Fr. Dehon³.

² Family is understood here “*in a strict and proper sense*” of all those who respond to a personal vocation to follow Christ, with Fr. Dehon as spiritual guide. Family is not understood “*in a wide and inappropriate sense*” of all those who are somehow attached to the SCJ institute and work with it.

³ Institutes of consecrated life which, at their request, can become part of the Dehonian Family are: the *Soeurs Servantes* and the *Religieuses du Coeur de Jésus* (or *Victimes du Sacré Coeur de Jésus*) by reason of their communion with the same spirituality at the beginnings of the foundation of the SCJs. For the same spirituality transmitted through the mediation of Dehonian founders: the *Istituto Reparador*, the *Compagnia missionaria del Sacro Cuore*, the

17. The component members of the Dehonian Family are called to **re-examine and incarnate the charism** according to the specific nature of their proper vocation and to make the charism fruitful, in make the charism fruitful, in **dynamic fidelity** according to the needs of the church in the world.

The SCJs have the task to guarantee a dynamic fidelity in the interpretation of the charism of Fr. Dehon insofar as they are historically the first incarnation of it.

18. A **progressive formation** is asked of **new component members**, a spiritual and missionary path they are to walk exhibiting generosity and fidelity. Our heritage is a beautiful and a rich one but not something that can be immediately be absorbed by intuition. It needs a **spiritual walk**, an intense relationship with the Lord (cf. Fr. Dehon's Spiritual Testament) and fearless lasting commitment. All of this is not possible without a solid theological foundation and an suitable formation.

19. Criteria for Belonging to the Dehonian Family:

a. Perception and living the centrality of the mystery of the pierced and open Heart of Jesus.

b. Recognition of Fr. Dehon as the "spiritual father" of one's spiritual journey in the church;

b. Participation in his charism, sharing its spirituality and mission, according to the state of life of each;

20. To **belong** to the Dehonian Family for those who ask to, (individually or in group) and commit themselves to "live in communion" the charism of Fr. Dehon, a prior **discernment**, which is conducted by competent organisms of the Dehonian Family is required (cf. No. 23)

Fraternidade Mariana do Coração de Jesus, the Missionary Sisters of the Sacred Heart, and the Missionárias do Amor misericordioso do Coração de Jesus.

The Priests of the Sacred Heart, by the will of Fr. Dehon, and by the declaration of the Church when it approved their Constitutions, are the first members of this Family.

It has to be acknowledged that the SCJs, at their different levels have a particular task in the discernment of membership to the Dehonian Family.

C. Communion and Organization

21. Relationships among components of the Dehonian Family, which are founded on baptismal dignity, are lived in a spirit of **communion**, support, and collaboration which welcomes and respects the gift of diversity and the organizational autonomy that each enjoys respectively.

22. It is appropriate to have instruments and occasions for gathering and communion, whether among various groups of lay Dehonians themselves or for different components at the national, geographical, or international levels; equally as well to promote participation at formational occasions and celebrations; to make it possible to have **collaboration** at a local level or higher, within a local church or within the universal church.

23. To promote communion it is opportune to see that an organism for connecting and communicating exists.

It is hoped that, at a national level and in geographic areas, the component members of the Dehonian Family can establish a **Commission of Organization and Representation**.

At the level of a province or region such a commission should promote, inspire, and coordinate the route that the local Dehonian Family undertakes.

LAY DEHONIANS

A Proposal for a Way of Living

I. Identity of the Lay Dehonian

1. A Lay Dehonian, man or woman, is first of all:

- that member of the Church who, faithful to Christ, is committed in the building of the Kingdom of God in the temporal realities;
- conscious of his baptismal vocation and lay mission, lives it strengthened by the experience of faith of Fr. Dehon, as a response to a personal vocation;
- recognizes in Fr. Dehon and his charism, approved by the Church, the reference for a personal spiritual life¹.

2. Inserted into a specific socio-ecclesial context:

- at a personal or group level of the Dehonian Family and of the Church, he/she lives his/her personal vocation.
- immersed in the every-day life and in the territory, but open to the signs of the times, this person lives the values of Dehonian spirituality;
- fully inserted in the secular reality of the world, this person concretizes the mission through his/her living testimony in the local Church and in society (*Christifideles Laici*, n. 15).

¹ It is spirituality and not works or specific apostolic activities that characterize the Dehonian charism; nevertheless a Lay Dehonian makes reference less to the SCJ Institute and its concrete activities than to the person of Fr. Dehon, his faith experience and his mission.

Among the Dehonian laity, certain groups highlight a certain interdependence with the Institute and the SCJ community; other groups believe that the relationship of communion and organizational autonomy to be important.

II. The Lay Dimension of the Dehonian Charism

3. The lay Dehonian has as his/her specific competency the appraisal and the lay incarnation of the Dehonian charism (CL, nn. 24, 56).

Such a one appraises the charism by his/her participation in the priestly, prophetic, and royal office of Christ (CL n. 14); he/she incarnates it within the confines of his/her mission in the world: in service to people, family, society, and Church (CL n.23).

Such a lay competence “often brings unexpected and rich insights into certain aspects of the charism, leading to a more spiritual interpretation of it and helping to draw from it directions for new activities in the apostolate” (*Vita Consecrata* n. 55).

4. The Lay Dehonian, animated by the spirit:

- lives “fully inserted in the world” with duties in the family, professional, work, political, and ecclesial environments and consecrates the world to God as a priestly oblation and spiritual sacrifice (CL n. 14);

- “feels with the Church” and shares its passion for the Gospel and the world like a prophet of love and of Christian hope (CL n. 14);

- promotes human and humanizing life, works for reconciliation and solidarity, is attentive to man’s situation especially of poverty and turmoil by restoring Christ present among the brothers and sisters;

- thus responds to the *call to holiness* which is proper to every baptized person (CL n. 16) by living in union with Christ in his love and reparatory oblation to the Father on behalf of man.

III. Formation

5. The Lay Dehonian is committed to a serious, progressive and constant formation, which needs a beginning and must be ongoing in order to receive the charism and translate it into spirituality and mission in the world and in today’s culture (cf. CfL n. 60).

SCJ religious sustain and accompany the lay person in the discernment of his/her own vocation, in formation, in the growth of lay people as “agents of formation”. As consecrated people, they are called to be “expert guides of spiritual life” and to cultivate the spirit (cf. VC. 55).

6. Formation must always tend toward permitting the person to grow harmoniously in the contemplative and active dimension of the Christian life and Dehonian spirituality, in respect to the identity of the group, age, sensitivity, and culture (CL n. 59)

7. The *contents of formation* that need to be placed in the different cultural and socio-ecclesial contexts deal with the following:

- basic Christian formation, an ecclesiology of communion, the problems facing evangelization, current social thinking of the Church, the values of Dehonian spirituality, the communion to be achieved as “We, the Dehonian Family.”

8. One *way of doing this* has three phases by which the different groups can be inspired:

- a period for *welcome*: the need to have and to propose space and activities for an initial approach or for an initial proposal of the lay Dehonian vocation;

- a period for *deepening* dedicated to lay formation in its various components;

- a time for *action*, during which the lay Dehonian takes on some responsibility, commits himself/herself to a lifestyle that is consistent with the Dehonian charism in a particular socio-ecclesial context.

This commitment can be undertaken by public declaration and annually renewed.

Moments of Celebration characterize the more significant stages on the formative way: they permit passage through the stages with more understanding, allow for witness and for growth as a group in the Family.

9. The *means of formation* like prayer, personal reflection, ongoing formation occasions, initiatives undertaken together, regular group meetings, celebrations, handout sheets, magazines... are varied according to the makeup of the group and the route chosen.

It is important to emphasize reference sources (persons, communities, experiences) and assure personal accompaniment which, in the process of discernment, allows each one to come to know his/her vocation, to permit gifts and abilities to grow, and to check out the consistency of one's life.

IV. Organizational Autonomy

10. The Dehonian Lay State:

- is open to communion;
- enjoys an organizational autonomy (CL n. 29) for which reason "reference points" and "structures" of coordination (commissions...) are necessary at the regional and national levels of geographical and international areas;
- will pay particular attention to the formation of those who provide inspiration/motivation;
- will work at providing helpful assistance tools.

V. Vital Communion within the Dehonian Family

11. The relationships among components making up the Dehonian Family, which are founded on baptismal dignity, and on the participation to the common spiritual heredity, are lived in the spirit of communion, support, and collaboration respecting and welcoming the gift of diversity (cf. CL n. 55).

12. Times of dialog and meeting lend themselves to promote understanding and relationships among components making up the Dehonian Family in the area if they are promoted by the respective commissions at the different levels.