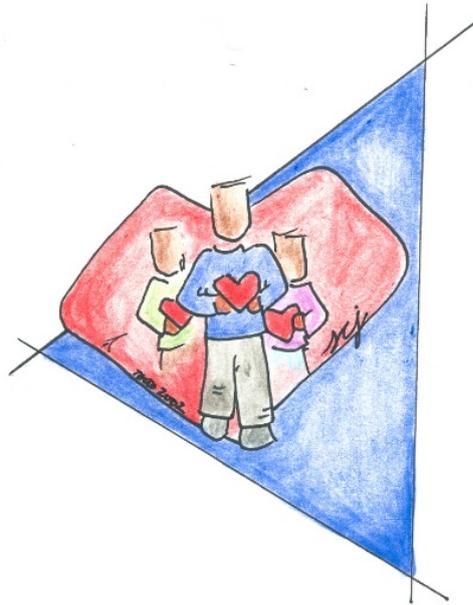


SPIRITUAL PATH – LAY DEHONIANS

WITH FR. DEHON IN THE 21TH CENTURY

Loved by God, in comunion, for the life of the world



YEAR TWO

ENCOUNTERING JESUS WITH FR. DEHON

He loved me and gave Himself up for me (Gal 2.20)

Rome, 2015

Many persons have worked on the project of the Spiritual Path, some of them Dehonians, others Lay Dehonians. To all of them we express our deepest appreciation.

The Working Group: Fr. Adérito Barbosa (POR), Fr. Bruno Pilati (ITS), Fr. Ramón Domínguez Fraile (ESP), Fr. Josef Gawel (POL), Fr. Vincenzo Martino (ITM), Fr. Fernando Rodrigues Fonseca (POR).

The Coordinators of the Project:

Year I: Fr. Adérito Gomes Barbosa scj
Fr. Ramón Domínguez Fraile scj
Spain & Portugal

Year II: Fr. Cláudio Weber scj
Latin America

Year III: Fr. Bruno Pilati scj
Italy

Year IV: Fr. John van den Hengel scj
English-speaking world

Redaction of Year I: Fr. João Carlos Almeida scj, Fr. Marcial Maçaneiro scj, Fr. Francisco Sehnem scj, Fr. André Félix Vital scj, Fr. Primo Corbelli scj, Fr. Antonio Manuel Teixeira Sequeira scj, Fr. Eduardo Agüero scj, and Fr. Fernando Rodrigues da Fonseca scj.

Translation and revision of texts: Fr. Ed Griesemer scj, Fr. Richard MacDonald scj, Fr. Tim Gray scj, Ms. Alma Garcia, Fr. Emmanuel Nanduri scj, Fr. John van den Hengel scj.

YEAR II – PRESENTATION

Loved by God, in communion, for the life of the world

Last May 2014, we made available for the Dehonian Family, the first year of the formational manual for lay people, consisting of the first ten chapters of a series of forty. We are pleased about the fact that many groups are now using them in their communities.

We now have the satisfaction of presenting the second year, with the meetings from 11-20. The topics of the first year have as a goal, to familiarize oneself with the person, figure and charism of Fr. Dehon. These topics have the purpose of helping us to know the faith experience of the founder and appropriate for ourselves this spiritual experience. The ‘Spiritual Path’ will continue on in the third year: ‘*The path of faith of Fr. Dehon*’; and the fourth and final year ‘*For the life of the world*’, will be presented the year after.

To take better advantage of these directives, we want to remind all the group facilitators and Dehonian formation leaders of the following:

- The Dehonian Family is present in 40 countries, which indicates a great wealth of cultural values and expressions and different levels of religious Dehonian formation as well. This rich variety presents at the same time an immense challenge when it comes to proposing valid guidelines for everybody. We realize it is impossible to satisfy all the needs of the cultural diversities. Nothing more remains than to suggest, that in every country, the facilitators and the formation leaders take the liberty of adapting these texts as best possible.
- This adaptation must consider above all; hosting techniques, teaching resources, ways of involving participants, a suggestion of complementary readings available in national languages, organization and ecclesial planning, at the national diocesan and parochial level, and selection of songs and ways of celebration, according to the local culture.
- Sufficiently extensive texts are designed for the formation of a one year period with monthly topics. They could be divided for the use of groups who get together once a week or every other week. They could be useful for days of recollection of one or two days or for spiritual retreats or assemblies.
- Citations of the texts of Fr. Dehon have been adapted to the system introduced along with the publication of the writings of the Founder on the web: www.dehondocs.it at the Center of Studies in Rome. To facilitate the identification of the cited paragraph in this manual, we add to this booklet a list of abbreviations from the writings of the Founder.
- It is important not to consider this manual as a finished product. It starts as “ad experimentum” and it could be improved with the collaboration of many. We ask the courtesy of sending your observations and proposals of improvements to one of the members of the International Coordination Group (ICG) of the Dehonian Family. (see below)

- The work group which has proposed this project also offers other systematic guidelines for the facilitators and formation leaders, in view of personal small gatherings and of lay groups who want to establish a path way to growth according to Dehonian spirituality. There are three texts:
 - Techniques of Christian education for adults, elements for groups of the Dehonian family (Fr. Adérito Barbosa, SCJ and Celina Pires, alvd).
 - The partner accompanying the group (Fr. Rinaldo Paganelli, SCJ).
 - Accompaniment and advisory person (Serafina Ribeiro, CM)
- The group will continue working on the texts of the 3rd and 4th year. After this, the formation of the lay Dehonians, must be assumed by the ***International Coordinating Committee of the Dehonian Family***, provisionally constituted at the meeting of May in 2014:
 - Rosalie Grace M. Escobia – rgme1971@yahoo.com – The Philippines, representative of the lay people
 - Ida Coelho – idajpcoelho@yahoo.com.br – Brazil, representative of the lay people.
 - Silvia Bertozzi – silvia.bertozzi@gmail.com – Italian missionary in Finland, representative of the Consecrated Persons.
 - Fr. Bruno Pilati SCJ – bruno.pilati@dehon.it – by the Religious of the SCJ Congregation, and
 - Fr. Claudio Weber - cweber@dehon.it – of the General Council of the Congregation (until the designation of a new one by the new administration).
- On May 2017, we will hold an International Assembly of the Dehonian Family, prepared by the international or continental meetings held in 2016. One of the purposes of this assembly is the formation of a definitive coordinating group that carries on the spirit and the development of the Dehonian Family and the coordination of the different realities that make up the Dehonian Family.

We hope that the topics, presented here, will help everyone to grow spiritually in sharing with the faith experience of Fr. Dehon. We cordially thank all who have contributed to the work of this endeavor.

The coordinators,

Fr. John van den Hengel scj
General Vicar

Fr. Claudio Weber scj
General Counselor

Rome, May 10, 2015.

Here is a summary of the content of the four years of the Spiritual Path:

Year One
FAMILIARITY WITH DEHONIAN LIFE
“Come and see” (Jn 1:39)

General objective

To raise interest in the Dehonian spirituality and mission

Specific objectives

- To obtain hands-on experience of Dehonian reality
- To raise awareness of being a lay person in the Church; the baptismal vocation as the foundation for the different forms of life in the Church
- To discern the call to participate in a specific spirituality
- To involve oneself in the formation of a Lay Dehonian

Year One has the following ten themes:

- *Who are we?*
- *Life as a gift*
- *The baptismal call*
- *Christian life*
- *From the devotion to the spirituality of the Heart of Jesus*
- *The different forms of life in the Church*
- *Identity and mission of laity in the Church*
- *Human / Christian / Dehonian values*
- *The participation in the charism as lay people*
- *Pilgrims – the visit to a Dehonian community – retreat*
Gift of a biography of Fr. Dehon / Prayer Book of the Dehonian Family

Second Year
TO ENCOUNTER JESUS CHRIST WITH FR. DEHON
“He loved me and has given himself for me” (Gal 2:20)

General objective

To grow spiritually in dialogue with the experience of faith of Fr. Dehon

Specific objectives

- To recognize a common spirit, a spirituality that unites you.
- To become aware that the spirituality of Fr. Dehon is a gift for the Church and the world
- To make oneself available for actions and a common project
- To appropriate this Spiritual Path in your daily life

Year Two has the following ten themes:

- *Fr. Dehon and the Ecce Venio of Jesus*
- *The experience of faith of Fr. Dehon: in the Heart of God*
- *The experience of faith of Fr. Dehon: in the heart of the world*
- *The experience of faith of Fr. Dehon: in the heart of the Church*
- *The lay dehonian, disciple of the Master Jesus*
- *Charism and mission of the lay person in the Church*
- *Companions on the road of Fr. Dehon. The saints of the Heart of Jesus*
- *Fr. Dehon and prayer*
- *The prayer of oblation*
- *The social dimension of Fr. Dehon*
- *Ritual: The giving of an icon of Jesus Christ*

Year Three

THE PATH OF FAITH OF FR. DEHON

“They will look on him whom they have pierced” (Jn 19:37)

General objective

To become aware of the experience of the Church of Fr. Dehon

Specific objectives

- To become aware of the vocational process of Fr. Dehon
- To grasp the identification of Fr. Dehon with the mysteries of Christ
- To deepen the various expressions of faith of Fr. Dehon
- To make one’s own the communion of Fr. Dehon with the Church

Year Three has the following ten themes:

- *A proposal for the life of a Lay dehonian*
- *Fr. Dehon and the Word of God*
- *The pierced Heart (John 19.34-37)*
- *Fr. Dehon and the Eucharist*
- *The presence of the Risen One transfigures our life*
- *The sense of Church of Fr. Dehon*
- *The communion of calls in the Church*
- *Eucharistic adoration*
- *Prophets of love*
- *Servants of reconciliation*
- *Ritual: The giving of a Bible and the symbol of sandals*

Year Four
FOR THE LIFE OF THE WORLD
“That they may have life and have it in abundance” (Jn 10:10)

General objective

To deepen the awareness of the social dimension of Fr. Dehon

Specific objectives

- To become interested in the social dimension of Fr. Dehon’s apostolate
- To spread Dehonian spirituality to different realities
- To put together contemplation and action
- To study the social dimension of Fr. Dehon

Year Four has the following ten themes:

- *Life in love*
 - *Open to the world*
 - *Dehonian values*
 - *Participation in the reign of charity and justice*
 - *Living in a family and society*
 - *Involved in social spirituality*
 - *Meditation with Fr. Dehon*
 - *Contemplation and action*
 - *Accompaniment and spiritual direction*
 - *Dehonian Family*
- Ritual: The giving of the Dehonian Cross and the Symbol of Salt and Light*

ABBREVIATIONS OF THE WRITINGS OF FR. DEHON AND OTHER DEHONIAN PUBLICATIONS

I – Writings of Fr. Dehon

<i>Title</i>	<i>Abbreviations</i>	<i>Previous Publications</i>
<u>Au delà des Pyrenées</u>	ADP	
<u>Cahiers Falleur</u>	CFL	STD 10
<u>Catéchisme Social</u>	CSC	OSC III
<u>Cœur Sacerdotal de Jésus</u>	CSJ	OSP 2
<u>Conférences Diverses</u>	CFD	
<u>Correspondance (voll. 1...)</u>	COR	
<u>Couronnes d'Amour (voll. 1 – 3)</u>	CAM	OSP 2
<u>De La Vie d'Amour envers le Sacré-Cœur de Jésus</u>	VAM	OSP 2
<u>Directions Pontificales, Politiques et Sociales</u>	DPS	OSC II
<u>Directoire Spirituel (1919)</u>	DSP	OSP 6
<u>Études sur le Sacré-Cœur de Jésus (voll. I – II)</u>	ESC	OSP 5
<u>Excerpta</u>	EXC	
<u>L'Année avec le Sacré-Cœur de Jésus (voll. I – II)</u>	ASC	OSP 3 – 4
<u>L'Usure au Temps Présent</u>	UTP	OSC II
<u>La Rénovation Sociale Chrétienne</u>	RSO	OSC III
<u>La Sicile, l'Afrique du Nord et les Calabres</u>	SAC	
<u>Le Plan de la Franc-Maçonnerie...</u>	PFM	OSC III
<u>Le Règne du Cœur de Jésus (Revue)</u>	RCJ	
<u>Lettres Circulaires</u>	LCC	
<u>Manuel Social Chrétien</u>	MSO	OSC II
<u>Manuscrits divers</u>	MND	
<u>Mille lieues dans l'Amérique du Sud</u>	MLA	
<u>Mois de Marie</u>	MMR	OSP 1
<u>Mois du Sacré-Cœur de Jésus</u>	MSC	OSP 1
<u>Nos Congrès</u>	NCG	OSC II
<u>Notes Quotidiennes (voll. I – V)</u>	NQT	
<u>Notes sur l'Histoire de ma Vie (voll. 1 – 8)</u>	NHV	
<u>Œuvres Sociales (Voll. I – VI)</u>	OSC	
<u>Œuvres Spirituelles (Voll. 1 – 7)</u>	OSP	
<u>Pensées</u>	PNS	
<u>Petit Directoire pour les Recteurs</u>	PDR	OSP 7
<u>Rénovation Spirituelle</u>	RSP	
<u>Retraite à Moulins</u>	RML	
<u>Retraite de Braisne</u>	RBR	NQT 1
<u>Retraite du Sacré-Cœur</u>	RSC	OSP 1
<u>Retraite en Mer (1911)</u>	RMR	

<u>R</u> etraite <u>S</u> acerdotale	RSD	
<u>R</u> etraite sur la <u>M</u> er (1906)	RME	
<u>R</u> ichesse, <u>M</u> édiocrité, <u>P</u> auvreté	RMP	OSC III
<u>S</u> œur <u>M</u> arie de <u>J</u> ésus	SMJ	OSP 6
<u>S</u> ouvenirs	SVN	OSP 7
<u>S</u> upplements	SPL	
<u>T</u> hesaurus	THE	OSP 7
<u>T</u> hèse pour la <u>L</u> icence	THL	OSC IV
<u>T</u> hèse pour le <u>D</u> octorat	THD	OSC IV
<u>U</u> n <u>P</u> rêtre du <u>S</u> acré- <u>C</u> œur de <u>J</u> ésus	PSC	OSP 6
<u>V</u> ie <u>I</u> ntérieure : <u>E</u> xercices <u>S</u> pirituels	VES	OSP 5
<u>V</u> ie <u>I</u> ntérieure : <u>P</u> rincipes	VPR	OSP 5

II – Way of citing NHV & NQT

NHV	NHV IX, 136
NQT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – <i>Texts of Fr. Dehon:</i> NQT III/1887, 106 – <i>Notes of CSD:</i> NQT 5, 592, n.13 – <i>Re-sent to the volumes:</i> NQT 1 – 5, pp...

III – Way of citing Le Règne du Cœur of Jésus

<u>L</u> e <u>R</u> ègne du <u>C</u> œur de <u>J</u> ésus	RCJ	1-12 (1889) 211
---	------------	-----------------

IV – Way of citing publications of CSD

<u>D</u> ehoniana	DEH	DEH 3/1999, 89
<u>S</u> tudia <u>D</u> ehoniana	STD	STD 25/2, 1994, 209

Meeting XI
FAITH EXPERIENCE:
ECCE VENIO AND BAPTISM IN FR. DEHON

Objectives of the Meeting

- Knowing how to read history... beginning with God.
- Discovering God in History.
- Focusing in on the first moment of the charisma that Fr. Dehon received in his Baptism.
- Living out Baptism as an act of oblation.

Outline of the Meeting: strategies and activities

From the objective of the first year – ‘familiarizing the laity with Fr. Dehon’ – we move on now to an encounter with Fr. Dehon in his faith experience, to what motivated his initiatives and guided his personal and ministerial path – his total immersion in Christ and His heart.

During the welcoming address, the transition from one year to another is reviewed, following the reflection on Baptism and the value that Fr. Dehon bestowed on this Sacrament in readings on his personal history.

A reflection follows, guided by these points:

- Biblical reading on *Ecce Venio*;
- Fr. Dehon’s text on Baptism
- Systematic reflection on the Baptism of Fr. Dehon and the *Ecce Venio* of Jesus and the *Ecce Ancilla* of Mary, and about the way all this has motivated his essential decisions and his charismatic experience.

The meeting continues with a dialog about the importance of Baptism in the lives of the participants, illuminated by a personal testimony of life and finishing with a celebration.

Development of the Meeting

A. Welcome

Prepare the room with baptismal symbols: a candle, a white dress, a bowl of water and a picture of Fr. Dehon.

Being the first meeting of the second year of the Dehonian formation, and assuming that there has been an interval between the first year and the second, the participants should be received with a warm greeting and encouraged to share what they did in that specific interval of time. After that, invite them to make the sign of the cross with water from the bowl.

B. Reflection: Ecce Venio and Baptism in Fr. Dehon

1. A Text from the Bible (Heb 10:5-10)

“⁵ When Christ came into the world, he said: “Sacrifice and offering you did not desire, but a body you prepared for me; ⁶ holocausts and sin offerings you took no delight in. ⁷ Then I said, ‘As is written of me in the scroll, Behold, I come to do your will, O God.’” ⁸ First he says, “Sacrifices and offerings, holocausts and sin offerings, you neither desired nor delighted in.” These are offered according to the law. ⁹ Then he says, “Behold, I come to do your will.” He takes away the first to establish the second. ¹⁰ By this “will,” we have been consecrated through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.”

2. A Text from Fr. Dehon

“I was baptized on March 24... it was the vespers of the feast of the Annunciation. Later, I was happy, joining the memories of my Baptism to the Ecce Venio of Our Lord, I placed a great trust in this closeness. The *Ecce Venio* of the Heart of Jesus has protected and blessed my entrance into the Christian life. It won't displease Our Lord, if I see in this circumstance a certain attention of His Divine Providence in the light of my own vocation as Priest/Oblate of the Heart of Jesus.” (NHV 1/2)

Comment

Fr. Dehon was a man who re-read history in the light of the Divine and discovered Him in his own history and his surroundings. In fact, Fr. Dehon does not pass over the important events of his life; more specifically, those of his sacramental life. In this way his Baptism was not something that remained in the past, he made it current and put it always in the present giving meaning to the “light” of the Word of God, of the liturgy of the Church, and of the whole process of discerning the will of God in his life. The life of Fr. Dehon consisted in always being current and giving full expression to his Baptism.

3. Theme for Reflection

3.1. Knowing how to read the Divine in the dates of our history. The time: Chronos and Kairos.

The difference between Chronos and Kairos

Throughout this reflection, these two Greek words will be used because they are important for understanding the diverse ways of comprehending the story and the events joined to them.

Chronos, like we said, is chronological time, meaning that time which passes and ceases to exist when the current event at hand is finished. It happens without having any direct influence on a person's life.

Kairos is very different; also a Greek word to name the time, but pointing in a very different direction. It is also about events, but full of meaning, to the point of giving meaning to life itself. Therefore, during this reflection it will be affirmed that *Kairos* is that time which is not lost in chronology; on the contrary, it remains, because it is significant to the person.

How Christians see Baptism

The majority of us, western Christians, were baptized as children; therefore, we had no power over our reasoning, nor did we have the capacity of retaining the image of Baptism in our memory. For this reason, many people do not remember, nor recall, the date of their Baptism. In this way, our Baptism has merely become a simple event that existed in the past, and as such, most claim is to be just a memory. Without realizing it, we have reduced the mystery of Baptism to the unstoppable chronology, that is, we have made of the moment of Baptism an instant in time, in which it remains watered down by the passage of time, and so it will never come back.

How to live Baptism? Is it Chronos or Kairos?

The word “chronology” comes from *Chronos*. *Chronos* signifies the time that passes by; it is time accounted for and measurable. In *Chronos* time stops existing; at most, it becomes a memory without any significance. Like, when I was a child I was given a bicycle and today, other than being a nice memory, it has no meaning in my daily life. In fact, I do not remember who gave it to me. If it was an important event it would have left a mark on my life.

The Baptism as Kairos

In the Christian life, Baptism cannot be simply educed as we previously described. Baptism should not belong to what we call *Chronos*, but rather to *Kairos*.

What does *Kairos* mean? It is the time which does not get lost in the past; on the contrary, it stays as some sort of content that grows, transforms and fills life with meaning. It is the time that has meaning and presence for me, it marks me, has an impact on my life, it gives me direction. This time is indestructible. This time does not turn back to the past, but remains in the present. We live this ‘time’ for example when we celebrate our birthday: the present moment in my life wouldn’t make sense without the actual moment of my birth. We celebrate our birthday because our coming to life is not reduced to an instant, but it is our very life itself that we celebrate. **This way of perceiving time, where an event is not immersed and lost in an irrecoverable past, but is a permanent “today”, full of context and meaning; we call *Kairos*.**

The importance of the difference between Chronos and Kairos, in order to understand our own Baptism, and the important events of life.

The difference between *Chronos* and *Kairos* is very important. We can do an exercise with our own memories to distinguish whether they are *Chronos* or *Kairos* because they give sense and purpose to life. Like the day of a marriage: it was not just a passing moment, but the fact that my life has changed in so many ways that my career is not the most important part of my life, nor my job, my money or my wellbeing; but rather my wife or husband and my children. Everything has meaning if it helps me to live the plan of life that started to build when I said ‘yes’ to my wife or husband. This is *Kairos*: it fills everything with new meaning and gives new shape to my life.

3.2. The Baptism of Fr. Dehon is a Kairos

Fr. Dehon re-reads his life starting at Baptism

Our founder interprets every instant of his Christian life in the “light” of his Baptism. This was not only a day of his personal chronology (March 24, 1843), but the unfolding of his vocation. How does he do it? His life is a succession of varied ‘*Kairos*’.

What consequence does Baptism have on Fr. Dehon's life?

Baptism made him a participant in the Pascal Mystery, that is, in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. And the Pascal Mystery is the culmination of the Oblation of Jesus Christ. For Fr. Dehon, this mystery comes to light in his Religious life. In this mystery, Fr. Dehon fixes his gaze on the cross because he is convinced that the cross is the way of making concrete the life of the 'Oblation' of Jesus Christ. Without it (the cross) there is no life, therefore he does not reject it, but accepts it and strongly urges all to live it¹. In this way, the cross of the Pascal Mystery is not a chronological date in the life of Jesus himself, but *Kairos*, a living event, because the Son of God keeps giving Himself for humanity; he continues being crucified today in many people of our world. For Fr. Dehon, Baptism is the "today" of Oblation; and Oblation is the daily living out of his Baptism.

3.3. The Baptism of Fr. Dehon and the Ecce Venio of Jesus: a Kairos in the Kairos

The Kairos of Jesus: his Ecce Venio

Let us look at the *Kairos* (time that does not get lost in the past, but continues acquiring new shapes) of Jesus as related in the letter to the Hebrews: the Son of God before becoming flesh was obedient to His Father. This availability of the Son to His Father, this *Ecce Venio* of the Son, acquired later a historical form: the Son of God became flesh. The entire life of Jesus was an expression of obedience to His Father.

The Kairos of Fr. Dehon: his Baptism

For our founder, Baptism is a living event in his life: he unites his Baptism to the *Ecce Venio* of Jesus; interprets his Baptism in the light of the surrender of Jesus to the will of the Father; and justifiably does this in the light of chronological coincidence: in the first vespers of the solemnity of the Annunciation. Baptism acquires for Fr. Dehon new meaning in the light of this mystery. Namely, he interprets his *Kairos* (Baptism) in the light of the *Kairos* of Jesus (*Ecce Venio*), configuring his whole life accordingly.

The re-reading of the Baptism of Fr. Dehon in the light of the Ecce Venio of Jesus

However, there remains a question: is it correct the way Fr. Dehon interprets his Baptism? Is it pious devotion, which adds nothing to his life? Let us realize one thing: in reading the biography of Fr. Dehon it remains clear that the reading of his Baptism is not a fantasy creation; nor the affirmation of something inexistent; instead, it comes from the deep understanding of his story on that particular day of his life. It is a licit exercise, because it permits us to understand "today", not just as a mere act of his will, but as a history of grace that takes place, and becomes active in him. This is possible when the Sacrament is not a mere ritual, but a permanent event.

Fr. Dehon's Baptism takes its authentic meaning from "*Kairos*" in as much as it identifies with the time 'planned' by Jesus regarding his coming among us. The Baptism of Fr. Dehon is the Sacrament of the *Ecce Venio* of Jesus, which the letter to the Hebrews recounts. This indicates for us that a deep meaning of the life of our Founder, that is, the most meaningful pages of his biography, cannot be found in the description and organization of the events of his life, but in the telling of the 'coming of the spirit' in his life.

¹ "When you have a cross, do not wish to change it for another; accept it just like it is. (...) Accept everything that Providence asks of you. Your dispositions will be perfect, if you think you do not love suffering for the sake of suffering, nor the cross for the sake of the cross, but love the Sacred Heart who wanted to give you this or that suffering, send you this or that cross" (CAM 2/142).

Therefore, to have a better understanding of the Baptism of Fr. Dehon, it is necessary to understand the meaning of the *Ecce Venio* of Jesus.

3.4. *The Ecce Venio of Jesus. The Ecce Venio of Fr. Dehon*

a) *The Ecce Venio of Jesus (Heb 10:5-10)*

For Fr. Dehon, chapter 10, verses 5-10, of the Letter to the Hebrews became the key to his Christological understanding, and of the self-interpretation of his life. The first important aspect of these verses is the notion of sacrifice and oblation in the Old Testament.

The author of the letter highlights the meaning and the newness of Jesus' sacrifice, showing the insufficiency and the uselessness of the sacrifice according to the old law: with the sacrifice of the law, man is not redeemed, that is why "there is only a yearly remembrance of sin, for it is impossible that the blood of bulls and goats take away sins" (Heb 10:3-4). The author does not disqualify the ancient rituals; on the contrary, he highlights the superiority of the new.

The blood of those sacrifices helped to admit and to recognize sin as such, by way of offering sacrifice, but not to forget it. The recognition of sin took for granted the recognition of the greatness of God and our incapability of worshipping Him. The one, who recognizes his sin, acknowledges that it is God who approaches mankind and not man who extends himself to God.²

² *Some details about sacrifice in the Old Testament*

To understand this better, let us take a look at some interesting details about the way the Old Testament sacrifices were performed. First of all, sacrifice is celebrated by the priest, which means that mediation is required for expiation. This does not mean that God places obstacles before us to establish a relationship with Him. However, that the sacrifice becomes necessary, He reminds humans that he can only form a relationship with God when he has accepted himself in truth. That truth, which calls for sacrifice, is this: that he who seeks a relationship with God is a sinner and, therefore, humans have the need of His mercy.

God relates with humans in his authentic self (in what he truly is) and not with the idea that humans have of themselves. The sacrifice made by the mediation of a priest, reminds humans that they have not carried out the plan of God, and therefore whoever wishes to form a relationship with God, is that very one who has deviated from God's plan in order to follow his own. Only when humans recognize themselves as a sinner, is the relationship with God authentic and not just a mere ritual.

Between humans and sacrifice offered, there is a firm link. It is not the animal that immolates, that redeems or forgives, but the link between humans and their offering, which gives origin to the identity between the victim and his sins. What is being immolated is the sinful one in whom I recognize myself, and not just an animal. It is then understood what the letter to the Hebrews says that the sacrifice renews the remembrance of the sin and makes humans capable of entering into a relationship with God, but it does not justify him nor redeem him. (It is God who justifies and redeems).

Example of a particular case of a sacrifice (the sacrifice of Saul in 1Sam 13)

The case of Saul is a model to help us understand the importance of sacrifice and of mediation in the sacrifice. Saul offers the sacrifice by himself in the absence of Samuel, who is the mediator chosen by Yahweh. It is about a sacrifice of communion whose purpose is to recognize the sanctity of Yahweh. Not to make the sacrifice according to the law, was a profanation of such sanctity (cf. Lv 19,8). When Saul offers the sacrifice, he does not have in mind the sanctity of God and uses the action in his favor (cf. 1Sam 13:7-9). The king tries to calm the rage of Yahweh using it as a way to gain favor for his own plans, failing to respect the sanctity of God: "I saw that the army abandoned me and it fled, and that you did not come at a critical time, and that the Philistines were already gathered in Micmas [...] Then I was forced to offer a holocaust". This gesture of Saul is full of conceit.

For ritualistic sacrifice in the OT... there must be a public recognition of the sin before the community; and the whole community, through the priest, offers the sacrifice. Saul offers a sacrificed animal not to point out his critical needs before God, but for fear of losing face. God is not the important one; it is Saul who makes himself important in this gesture. When Saul skips over the mediation, he places himself as the imperial rule of all things and forgets its "sacramental" condition which recognizes God as head of all things.

Therefore the objective of sacrifice is to recognize oneself a sinner in a public way, through sacrifice offered in the temple as a gesture of humility, in which God is recognized for His kindness and greatness not to imagine that he who performs it is honoring God.

Sacrifice in the past, reminded me of my sin, that God was not condemning me for the sin, but that I was looking for redemption in forgiveness. That's why in the Old Testament year after year the sacrifices are repeated, while in the New Testament there is only one sacrifice. **Redemption consists precisely in being united to this one sacrifice, not to make new ones. The question is: how to interpret the sacrifice of Christ. Here is the key.**

How to understand the Ecce Venio of Jesus?

It is in this complicated context, wherein it is necessary to understand the *Ecce Venio* of the Son who comes into the world. The text of Heb 10:5-7 helps to understand that in the New Testament it goes beyond the complex issue of a religious 'trade off' [in which through an animal victim offered to God... and therefore something external to the person who makes the offering..., one purchases redemption]. In the New Testament, however, the 'offered' and the one who offers are the same person: Jesus. There is no more an animal victim external to the person who offers, but it is the same Jesus who offers Himself as a sacrifice in a totally new way. Therefore, sacrifice redeems if it frees man to pronounce his *Ecce Venio*, in the same way as Jesus, in the offering of his own life. "Behold, I come to do your will, O God". This is the same road taken by Fr. Dehon. In the light of what we have said, what does all this mean for our Founder and for us?

b) Ecce Venio and the Oblation of Fr. Dehon

The first title given to the Dehonian Congregation: "Oblates of the Sacred Heart of Jesus" already indicates the deep intuition of Fr. Dehon: "the offering and the consecration of themselves to the good pleasure of the Sacred Heart of Jesus (CST 1881)".³

Oblation for Fr. Dehon

'Oblation' for our Founder makes personal the *Ecce Venio* of the Son. In fact, if the *Ecce Venio* means: "Here I am, ready to act, to undertake, to suffer whatever you want, to sacrifice whatever you ask of me" (DSP 14), then oblation has the same meaning in our daily life: "the Lord is asking from us, a life of selflessness, sacrifice, resignation to our own will and to our own inclinations, and a complete abandonment of our own being... a pure and unselfish love, sacrificing everything and forgetting about ourselves" (DSP 26).

Oblation for the Dehonian

Oblation is the way in which the Dehonian proclaims his *Ecce Venio*. Therefore, it is not about offering a sacrifice foreign to oneself; on the contrary, it is about offering the gift of self.

We are faced with the great and profound intuition of our Founder, that which cost us so very much to assimilate. Generally, we understand oblation as an offering of prayers, actions, gestures, sufferings... as reparation to the Heart of Jesus. However, many times those gestures or sacrifices cannot be identified with us; that means, we offer an act, but in this act I do not offer my life. And what Fr. Dehon is telling us is that neither our sacrifice nor our actions or our gestures... ought to be reduced to exact and precise occurrences, but rather those instances must touch the very depths of our own being.

³ U. Chiarello, *Carisma del fondatore e spiritualità Dehoniana* (STD 28), 108

The exercise of oblation must be a healing action as well, because our life-acts acquire depth and integrity.

Baptism and Oblation

Baptism lived in this way, signifies authentic redemption. If sin chips away at that which is human... that is to say, if my everyday actions do not reflect who I really am as a person... then, oblation comes to the rescue and fills the need. In more colloquial terms: the act of oblation is not the external action of sacrifice that I offer to the Lord to please Him, rather, in this gesture or sacrifice is placed my whole life. If my action stands apart from me, that is to say, if I am the one who acts, then, redemption is a real event in my life.

Union with the mysteries of Christ's life – a Spiritual Imitation

It is not a coincidence that Fr. Dehon would occupy himself with the mysteries of the life of Jesus, nor that the mystic medieval Christian would speak to him of the outstanding events of the life of our Savior. Referring to the 'events' of the life of the Nazarene is referring to Jesus in a fullest way. Each act or gesture of Jesus' life is more than an instant moment in His life (something more than *chronos*); it is His 'entire' life (it is a *Kairos*). When our Founder, following the medieval tradition and the Ignatian exercises, puts forth the mysteries of the life of the savior – the events of the life of Jesus of which we have been talking – he was really proposing the 'event' of salvation, which is not distinct in itself from the savior. Recognizing in every event of Jesus' life the totality of His presence is the right Christological reading. It is with this insight that the mysteries of the Nazarene's life are not for the purpose of exterior imitation only, but a spiritual example in which the believer gets to overpower the rupturing nature of sin, putting into play in each action or gesture, the totality of his life.

If each act in the passion of Jesus reveals the Lord Himself, this means that all the mysteries of Jesus' life are at the same time *Ecce Venio*: Incarnation, Passion, Easter, etc. The *Ecce Venio* is then an Easter event, and our oblation is the verification of such an Easter event celebrated and lived in the everyday life of our Baptism.

C. Dehonian Testimony

Baptism and *Ecce Venio*

I was born in a small town Yogyakarta, Indonesia, on September 15, 1954. Five days after my birth, my father, in a Muslim meeting prayer, announced my name: Sugino.

Thirteen years later I chose Paul as a Baptismal name. And so, I have a given name and a chosen name. I was pretty familiar with the figure of Paul because of Sacred Scripture and the catechesis which taught me about Him.

I was born into a Muslim family of seven siblings. My oldest brother and sister converted from Islam to Hinduism. The first two baptized members of the family were the fourth child and myself, the fifth, when I was thirteen years old. Two years later two of my younger sisters were baptized; my third brother received Baptism in 1979 along with all his family; my mother received Baptism when she got seriously sick in 1983, a few months before her death; lastly, my father in 1986. Not

one member of my mother's family has converted to Catholicism. However, we never had any family problems due to the diversity of faith.

I had the first contact with Catholicism when I was in a Catholic school. Every first Friday of each month, all the students, mostly Muslims, participated in Mass. I liked the prayers because I understood them better than the Muslims' in Arabic.

A second element that led me to Baptism was the "community" (*kring*). The Catholics used to get together in their homes to pray, I was curious to know and listen to what they did. I asked my father's permission to participate in the weekly meeting of the community and going to Mass every Sunday. On Sunday, he nodded, asking me to be faithful. When I did not get out of bed on time to go to church, my father woke me up saying: "You have asked my permission to go to church; now that you have it, you must be responsible and consistent with your decision". That same consistency of my father was what I needed for the gift of Baptism. At the age of eleven, I started down the catechumenal road. I was baptized before Christmas of 1967, and received my first communion on Christmas Eve, the same year.

The ecclesial community is the privileged place for the growth of the Baptismal gift. It is necessary to form ourselves and to be formed by others. Even though I did not know the term *Ecce Venio*, I experienced the presence of community and sought to make that value my own. My family prepared the soil to grow within me the seed of 'presence' to others.

Three years after my Baptism I felt the desire to enter the seminary, but I did not dare to ask my father for permission. The visit from the priest who baptized me was providential and facilitated the dialog with my parents. I consider the decision as an *Ecce Venio* to the call of the Lord, through many people.

With great enthusiasm, I lived out the four years of formation in the minor seminary, governed by Franciscan priests. After this formation period I decided to enter the congregation of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, with the idea of working in parishes in South Sumatra. Some Dehonians, Monsignor Albertus Hermelink, SCJ; the priest Martin van Ooij, SCJ, and Fr. Gerardo Zwaard came to the seminary to give us information about the Church in South Sumatra.

The dream of dedicating myself to pastoral work in a parish, has never come true. Being ordained, the province, and I think Divine Providence as well, asked me to prepare myself for study in theology. I have never regretted it! *Ecce Venio!* Then, I thought about my dream of working in parishes through the confreres I was going to form.

After ten years of service in formation, I asked for a sabbatical year to work in a suburban parish: Passang Surut (malaria zone). But the province and the Congregation asked me to be the Provincial Superior between 1998 and 2004. *Ecce Venio* was my answer.

On July 15 in 2004, having finished the second triennium as a Provincial, someone proposed the possibility of a sabbatical year. On the same day, I received a letter that named me as responsible for the postulancy program. Four days later, I started in that the service for which I was asked. I pronounced the Dehonian motto: *Ecce Venio*. It is the logical theme of Baptism. The General chapter of 2009 chose me as general counselor, again, *Ecce Venio*.

Being baptized means to be "Christ-like" and anointed by the Holy Spirit. The attitudes of Christ must be assumed and internalized... an *Ecce Venio*, "Behold, I come to do your will". It is a rough road, but yet, a great aim of life. To make it all happen it is necessary to have help from others. On

my personal journey, my parents have been very important; also my oldest brother, Fr. Willibrordus Weijbrans OFM (rector of the minor seminary), Fr. Cees van Paassen, SCJ; (Director of the Scholasticate and later on the college of formation) and certainly, Fr. Dehon, whom I have tried to know through his writings and studies about his person. The people of the Dehonian family have supported me and continue to help me live the Baptismal consecration, enriched by the religious and priestly consecration.

(P. Paulus Sugino, SCJ – Indonesia)

D. Discussion Points

Some issues are proposed in order to help with the narrative of one's history

A narrative, or just the beginning of it, in which the person tells his or her own story in the light of Baptism. As an insertion in the history of Jesus, in His mysteries, (that is, events of His life, where each event shows forth the “fullness” of the life of Jesus, the expression of His *Ecce Venio* offered to the Father when entering this world). From sharing in the reflection on the previous point, many personal testimonies can emerge other than the one presented on the previous point.

Do I feel that in my life, my Baptism is a Kairos, or on the contrary, is it a distant memory belonging to the relentless chronology?

Am I able to contemplate in each of Jesus' gestures the totality of His person, or am I more likely to divide it in order to interpret it as I interpret myself?

Do I live the oblation as redemption or do I interpret it like a set of separate acts of life in which my life is not fully played out?

E. A Moment of Prayer

1. Hymn

A hymn of “self” offering is proposed (for example, if it is possible, “Abandonment”, taken from the prayer of the same name by Charles Foucauld).

2. Invitation

From the Letter to the Hebrews

“When Christ came into the world, he said: “Sacrifice and offering you did not desire, but a body you prepared for me; holocausts and sin offerings you took no delight in. Then I said, ‘As is written of me in the scroll, Behold, I come to do your will, O God.’” (Heb 10:5-7)

3. Invocation

Heart of Jesus to you I owe all my love and all my adoration.

I ardently desire to repair the wrong
and the ingratitude in me and in humanity
that offends your infinite love.

That is why I offer you and consecrate to you entirely
my heart, my affections, my work, myself, my life, and my last breath.

I intend to do everything for your glory and for your love
And unite myself more intimately to your reparatory oblation.

I beg you to accept my humble offering
through the pure hands of your Mother and my Mother Mary.

Dispose of myself and my life Oh Lord, in the way that pleases your heart. Amen

(Adaptation of the Oblation of Fr. Dehon)

4. Antiphon

“The love of Christ impels us, once we have come to the conviction that one died for all; therefore, all have died. He indeed died for all, so that those who live might ***no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised.***” (2Cor 5:14-15)

5. Prayer

Lord, you who govern everything, Father of Jesus Christ, Eternal Prince and Liberator of slaves, we ask that nothing old exists in those who have converted and turned to you in truth; you want from them a pure soul and have called them to a second birth in your great love; impress on them the living image of your only Son. Make their faith strong, so nothing can separate them from you and keep them united to your Word. To Him be glory and power; to you and the Holy Spirit, now and forever. Amen.

6. Word of God (1Jn 3:16-24)

This is how we know what love is: Christ gave His life for us. We too, then, ought to give our lives for others! If we are rich and see others in need, yet close our hearts against them, how can we claim that we love God? My children, our love should not be just words and talk; it must be true love, which shows itself in action. This, then, is how we will know that we belong to the truth; this is how we will be confident in God's presence. If our conscience condemns us, we know that God is greater than our conscience and that He knows everything. And so, my dear friends, if our conscience does not condemn us, we have courage in God's presence. We receive from Him whatever we ask, because we obey his commands and do what pleases Him. What he commands is that we believe in His Son Jesus Christ and love one another, just as Christ commanded us. Those who obey God's commands live in union with God and God lives in union with them. And because of the Spirit that God has given us we know that God lives in union with us.

From the reading, we need to highlight the invitation to oblation. Oblation does not love only with words, but it must be put into action according to the truth. Oblation means living according to the commandments because we do what pleases God. The commandments consist in believing in the name of Jesus, and in His whole life, in his gestures and in all his actions.

7. Prayer

Fulfill, O Father, your work of love in each individual, set your Son, Heart of humanity and of the whole world, as our hope of salvation... for us and for all who hear your voice. Through our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

8. Petitions

To be said spontaneously

All response: "Here I am Lord, to do your will".

Conclude with the Our Father.

9. Final Prayer

Father, to your glory and our salvation, you have established Christ your Son as the eternal High Priest, grant us, make your people through His blood experience the redemptive strength of the cross and become evangelizers of your kingdom, through Christ our Lord. Amen

Literature

- Catechism of the Catholic Church, [numbers 1213–1284](#).
- Compendium of the Catechism of the Catholic Church, [numbers 252–264](#).
- Catechesis of Pope Francis about Baptism (General Audiences from [01-08-2014](#) and [01-15-2014](#))

Meeting XII

THE FAITH EXPERIENCE OF FR. DEHON: IN GOD'S HEART – *ECCE VENIO*

Objectives of the Meeting

- Know the foundation experience of the Charism of Fr. Dehon and what it means in his religious and apostolic life
- Internalize this experience to be able to illuminate the life of the lay Dehonians
- Grow spiritually in dialogue with the experience of the faith of Fr. Dehon and live it with other people

Outline of the Meeting: strategies and activities

Continue with the previous reflection, on Baptism and the later readings of Fr. Dehon about the circumstances regarding his Baptism. It would have us deepen the Christian experience of Fr. Dehon with respect to two biblical expressions that he loved: *Ecce Ancilla* and *Ecce Venio*.

Begin by presenting the Annunciation of the Angel to Mary, the initial mystery of the presence of the Son of God present among men, the hour of *Ecce Venio* reverberating in the *Ecce Ancilla* of Mary.

Then, present the text of Fr. Dehon which reflects on the life of love and complete fidelity to the *Ecce Venio* of Christ until His death on the cross. From here on, deepen the reflection.

Development of the Meeting

A. Welcome

Suggestion: Entering into the theme of the day, invite all participants to mention something about the previous topic:

- Whether they can remember the date of their own Baptism, or their age at the time.
- Whether or not they discussed with their parents or godparents something related to their own Baptism, or the first renewal of the Baptismal promises.
- When was the first occasion on which they became aware of being baptized?
- Or the first renewal of their Baptismal promises.

B. Reflection: ‘Oblation’ in Dehonian spirituality – *Ecce Venio*

1. A Text from the Bible (Lk 1:26-38)

Fr. Dehon used to say that in the *Ecce Venio* (*Here I am – Heb 10:7*) and in the *Ecce Ancilla* (*Behold the handmaid – Lk 1:38*) is found the perfect synthesis of our charism, spirituality and vocation.

This attitude of radical availability defines the identity of each disciple of Fr. Dehon. He saw as providential and revealing the fact of having been baptized on March 24th, Vigil of the Feast of the Annunciation, or rather, the feast of the “*Ecce*” (*Here I am...*) of Jesus and Mary as we have seen in

the previous session. In this encounter we want to deepen this “oblate availability” and the spiritual motivations that brought him to want to enter into the Heart of God.

We begin by listening to the Word of God (Lk 1:26-38):

“In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man named Joseph, you who enjoy God’s favor! The Lord is with you. She was deeply disturbed by these words and asked herself what this greeting could mean, but the angel said to her, “Mary, do not be afraid; you have won God’s favor. Look! You are to conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you must name him Jesus. He will be great and will be called Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his ancestor David; he will rule over the House of Jacob forever and his reign will have no end.” Mary said to the angel, “But how can this come about, since I have no knowledge of man?” The angel answered, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will cover you with its shadow. And so the child will be holy and will be called Son of God. And I tell you this too: your cousin Elizabeth also, in her old age, has conceived a son, and she whom people called barren is now in her sixth month, for nothing is impossible to God.” Mary said, “You see before you the Lord’s servant, let it happen to me as you have said.” And the angel left her.”

The Word of the Lord.

All: **Praise to You Lord, Jesus Christ.**

We know how Fr. Dehon loved the mystery of the incarnation. He understands Mary’s “yes” and Jesus’ “yes”: Behold the handmaid of the Lord, behold that I have come to do your will. We have already seen the meaning of Baptism in the Christian and the secular Dehonian life, and how Fr. Dehon, has later reread his Baptism in the light of the *Ecce Venio* of Jesus, i.e., in the light of his experience of faith in Christ who “loved me and gave his life for me” (Gal 2:20) and “He came to do the will of the Father” (Heb 10:7). As a result, he wanted also to love like Christ and give his life out of love.

Mary, before this call, so engaging, is looked upon as a humble and available servant to do the will of the Father: “according to your Word”. In the biblical texts, only people of great fidelity are called servants of God. Mary will also be true to the word and consistent throughout her life, up to the foot of the cross, and then, next to the disciples, helping them with her presence and her prayer (cf. Ac 1:14).

Jesus, in this text, is presented as the Son of the Most High (v. 32) and Son of God (v. 35), with very little difference between the two expressions. After His mission has been accomplished, He will be recognized as the one that does not take into account His dignity as Son of the Most High, but emptied himself calling himself servant of God and of all (cf. Phil 2:5-11). Everything is done through the Virgin Mary and the action of the Holy Spirit, which leads us to recognize in this child a totally new relationship with God, which will be confirmed by the voice of the Father at the Baptism of Jesus and the Transfiguration. A Son who, unlike other servants of God, places himself fully in the Father and does His will. And will do so to the end. He confirms this disposition in his agony and fulfills it without reservation on the cross: *Father, into your hands I place my spirit* (Lk 23:46).

In the contemplation of this mystery, Fr. Dehon made his deepest experience of faith and love: “*He loved me and gave His life for me*” (Gal 2:20).

2. A Text from Fr. Dehon

“Where to find, in truth, a heart that has loved us so much, so pure, so perfect and generous, as the Heart of our God and Redeemer, as the Heart of Jesus, a heart given out of love? Who has suffered more painfully? For whom or for what? His will was the will of the Heavenly Father. Since the incarnation, all of his life, in his passion and even in the Eucharist, the “Here I am” was his rule of life (...) On Calvary the victim’s altar was erected, the sacrifice was consummated. Look at Jesus, His cross, His blood, His wounds, His heart opened by the lance (...) This Sacred Heart loved us beyond all measure, we can say even beyond sanity. Can we then remain indifferent to such love? Can we turn down this heart, which has loved us so much, which rightly asks from us; a mutual love, gratitude, and the total surrender of ourselves? (DSP 48.65.66).

3. Theme for Reflection

3.1. Charism and Spirituality

We try to understand and celebrate the meaning of this “oblation-like availability” in the *charism* and spirituality of the founder. But first it is necessary to clearly distinguish the *charism of ‘Spirituality’*.

When we talk about charism, we refer to a grace of God (gift) given to the Church by way of a chosen person (in our case, Father Dehon). It is not only a “charism of the founder”. We can rightly say that it is a “charism of foundation”. It is verified by the coming together of other individuals and the recognition of the Church. For this reason, we can drink today from this fountain and live out the charism in dynamic fidelity to the original inspiration of our founder. The first members who came together around the Dehonian charism were the *Oblates of the Heart of Jesus*, today, the Congregation of the Priests of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. But we know that this charism is not the exclusive property of the religious members. Many lay men and women at different times, from the days of the Foundation, were attracted by the Dehonian charism. Fraternities and congregations as well can live, or have as a reference, this charism. Therefore, we can speak of the Dehonian family.

And Spirituality? Is it not the same as charism? To tell the truth, spirituality is the expression of the charism within us. It is the style which is born out of the grace of God that defines us. If the *charism is active in our very person, making us Christ-like in a Dehonian way (that is according to the Heart of Christ) then spirituality is seen in our actions leading us to love as Jesus loved, speaking as Jesus spoke, living as Jesus lived.*

In this sense we can talk about various spiritual or charismatic families in the Church: Benedictines, Carmelites, Salesians, Jesuits, Franciscans... and Dehonians! Some inspired individuals of charismatic families formed not only a religious congregation; some started several different institutes and also associations of lay men and women. There were charismatic families who began as associations of laity and, later, some of them felt called to a special consecration, choosing the religious or priestly life. Today the associations of laity and consecrated persons remain in different institutes, joined by the same charism or charismatic family.

Fr. Dehon made a discernment regarding his charism and cultivated his spirituality throughout his life. This occurred in a “process of growth” beginning with an intense discernment of God’s will,

followed by an apostolate in education, social and missionary endeavor, ending with a convergence of all efforts in an interior life ever more profound. His discernment leads him to an oblation-like availability, his apostolate is found in reparative solidarity and his interior life is marked by ecclesial communion.

Charism and the Dehonian spirituality can be understood, then, in the sense of these three phases, which are not self exclusive or successive. These great dimensions of his interior life, are above all, three prime areas in his “faith experience”, three pillars of his spiritual identity, always present, but at certain times, appearing with greater intensity. To express this identity in a comprehensive way, we can say that Fr. Dehon is a Christian who sought to live his life according to the Spirit, in communion with the reparatory oblation of Christ to the Father, on behalf of humanity (cf. Constitutions SCJ 6).

3.2 Experience of Being Loved

The beginning and the basis of the spirituality of Fr. Dehon is the experience of God’s love in contemplation of the open side of Christ on the cross (cf. Jn 19:37; Zec 12:10), as the fount of salvation (cf. Is 12:3). Fr. Dehon seeks to live the experience of the Apostle Paul translated with these words: “this life that I live in the flesh I live in the faith of the son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me” (Gal 2:20). This is the phrase with which the current Constitutions SCJ translate the ‘experience of faith’ of the founder (cf. 2).

The permanent availability of being united to Christ in his oblation of love to the Father, in favor of humanity, runs throughout the history of Fr. Dehon and is the unifying principle of his spiritual life. A text of his time in the Seminary in Rome, reveals this fundamental availability: “Our Lord has taken all my inner self and there has created the provisions that were to be the dominant note of my life, notwithstanding my weaknesses: the devotion to the Heart of Jesus, the humility, the conformity to his will, the union with him, the life of love. This should be my ideal and my life forever. In this way I was preparing for the mission for which I was destined, for the work of His Heart” (NHV 4/213).

3.3 Oblative Love

Today most scholars of Dehonian spirituality agree that oblative love is the main feature of the Dehonian Charism. This is why the Act of Oblation is one of the daily prayers of all members of the Dehonian family. With prayer we express this union with the reparatory oblation of Christ, to the glory of the Father and the salvation of humanity. Fr. Dehon refers to it expressly in a circular letter of 1887 (cf. COR-LCC-1887-0624-0115127 [June 24, 1887]).

Fr. Dehon manifests other nuances of the same oblation through words such as immolation, victim, sacrifice and abandonment. It is a priestly spirituality, inspired in the *Ecce Venio* (Heb 10:7) of Jesus, in his obedience to the Father, who immolated himself for humanity. The *Ecce Ancilla* (Lk 1:38) of Mary manifests the same fundamental attitude of availability. There we find Mary the servant, a model servant of the Church.

The current constitutions of the Congregation of the Priests of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, definitively approved in 1985, say: “Founding the Congregation (...) Fr. Dehon wished that his members would explicitly join their religious and apostolic life to the reparatory oblation of Christ to the Father for mankind. *This was his original and specific intention, as well as the nature of the*

Institute. As Fr. Dehon himself, said in these words: *In Ecce Venio... Ecce Ancilla... are found our vocation, our purpose, our duty, our promises (DSP 14)*” (cf. Constitutions SCJ 6).”

3.4. Trinitarian Mysticism

Fr. Dehon lived this *abandonment* to the will of the Father, in union with the Heart of Jesus, formed by the Holy Spirit, which is God’s (con)substantial love. The place of this experience of love is the Trinity. Already in his seminary days, Fr. Dehon reveals this interior disposition: “With Him (the Heart of Jesus) I want to live his union with the Father, through frequent acts of love, adoration, gratitude, of oblation, of abandonment, of forgetting myself, of independence regarding creature goods” (NHV 4/215).

Fr. Dehon made the connection between the devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus and the French school of spirituality (originated with Berulle): “devotion to the Holy Spirit is a little one-sided; but it is exactly through the Holy Spirit that all the graces of light and supernatural life and sanctification come to us. This devotion should be joined to that of the Heart of Jesus. The Holy Spirit is like the spiritual Heart of God, his consubstantial love. The Holy Spirit has formed the Sacred Heart of Jesus (...) The Sacred Heart of Jesus must reign in society through the Holy Spirit” (ART-CHR-0002-1897-8031897/102 [July 1897]).

However, living this Trinitarian mysticism, Fr. Dehon admits that in his life he encountered many difficulties in honoring and loving the Holy Trinity. This is the great spiritual discovery of his later years, lived under the strong image of the Trinity, which becomes the prayer of the last period of his life. He said: “I like more and more the devotion to the most Holy Trinity. *God the Father* is my father and creator. He is my dad, more so than he who I had on earth. I owe Him everything, my being and my life. I love Him infinitely, and in a very familiar way, I want His glory and his Kingdom. The *Son of God* became my brother with the Incarnation. He gave His life for me; He comes to me in the Eucharist. I love Him beyond measure; I recline unceasingly on his chest, as St. John did. I want to live with Him and love Him more and more. The Holy Spirit is my director, my guide, the soul of my soul and like a mother to me. I want to live with him, listen to him in everything and show myself as his loving and faithful disciple. ‘*The Glory to the Father and the Creed*, are tributes to the Most Holy Trinity” (NQT 45/20).

The reading of the last page of his diary, two months before his death, reveals this experience of spiritual maturity: “June, month of the Heart of Jesus, the Holy Trinity, the month of the Holy Spirit, month of the Blessed Sacrament.” Glory to the Father, to the Son and to the Holy Spirit. Glory to the Father, who is my Father and Creator. Glory to the Son, who became my brother and Savior. Glory to the Holy Spirit who is my guide and the soul of my soul” (NQT 45/77).

3.5 How to Live Oblation

Living “oblation” means joining oneself to Christ who offered Himself totally to the Father on behalf of his brothers and sisters to save them. Fr. Dehon wanted even his religious to do a fourth vow: that of victimhood. He himself did so in his first religious profession in 1878. However, the Church only approved a promise of victimhood, because of the difficulties in defining the subject matter of this fourth vow.

Oblation, as we understand it today, is not a religious privilege. “All the Christian faithful, of any State or Order, are called to the fullness of the Christian life and to the perfection of charity” (LG

40). The act of oblation is most complete in the light of this fullness, and requires great faith and love of God. It presupposes a permanent disposition of personal conversion, a spirit of service and availability to each other in the family, in the community, at work and in social life.

The Eucharist is the high point of this union of love, and Eucharistic adoration is the “follow-up” of this fundamental experience of the contemplation of God’s love. Fr. Dehon says: “the Eucharist is the fire, the bases, the center of life, of all work, of all the apostolate. The Gospel witness who does not live by the Eucharist possesses a “word” without life and “action” without effectiveness” (NQT 25/33). Fr. Dehon took seriously the “Do this in commemoration of me”, which is repeated in every Eucharistic celebration. And he did not limit this to the time of the celebration. He wanted to expressly make of life a *continuous Eucharist*. Abandonment like that of Jesus is what he wanted to realize in his daily life; a life that honored the memory of Jesus who gave Himself to the Father for us.

And in this, Fr. Dehon was exemplary. He reserved nothing for himself: no money, no comfort, and no personal privileges. He worked hard, he devoted himself to others, was cordial and brotherly with his religious, also with the most troublesome and those that caused most difficulties to him. He had solidarity with the poor; he dedicated many resources and much time and talent to them. Always faithful to the Church, even when the church closed his work due to internal misunderstandings (*Consummatum est*, 1883-1884), and when all seemed lost, he took the blame for difficulties, instead of throwing them on others; increased the spirit of prayer; he offered his work up to the Heart of Jesus and humbly promised to clarify the situation and obtain the recognition of the Church, so greatly desired. He lived this life of “self-oblation” specifically in relation to the religious who gave him the most opposition and criticized him: Fr. Blancal, who Fr. Dehon accompanied cordially in the period of his illness until death.

According to the example of the Founder, of our charismatic family, every Dehonian is called to live the spirit of oblation every day. Family life not only offers abundant opportunities to live the spirit of self-giving, but also highly edifying examples of how much one can be-for-the-other, suffer for the other, show patience ahead of the persistent resistance of teenage children or of children caught up in drugs. There is no lack of opportunities for forgiveness and examples of people who, by way of forgiving much, obtain a reconciliation that reconstructs an environment of unity in the family that once seemed lost. The same should happen everywhere in the human family, in groups of lay Dehonians, in groups of Pastoral Ministry in which we participate, in relationship with co-workers, neighbors and community service to which we are called to lead the world to the Heart of God.

The question always is: How much love are we capable of? How much do we love a child that fails to mature, a selfish spouse who wants only to be served, a brother of the community that could grow spiritually if welcomed, supported, corrected fraternally, forgiven? Pope Benedict XVI, in the Encyclical on Hope (cf. *Spe Salvi*, nn. 34-40), developed a very interesting reflection on hope in the Christian community... *an active Hope* that helps another to develop the possibility to advancing on the path way to God. Parents are able to suffer peacefully in the care of an immature child, because they feed on the hope that one day the child will mature. An active hope does not come about only by waiting, but also by understanding; in forgiveness, in kindness to others, and doing do good to others without them having to do something to deserve it. Paul reflects on this same thought concerning the love of the heart of God: “*Proof that God loves us is that Christ died for us while we*

were yet sinners” (Rom 5:8). Benedict XVI asks himself: And we... are we capable of suffering for the other?

C. Dehonian Testimony

What impressed me the most regarding the life of Fr. Dehon, the founder of the Congregation, was to see him overcome barrier after barrier, in order to carry out what he believed was God’s will for him.

It was the year 2000, a very special time for Catholics it was the celebration of the Great Jubilee which called on the Church to rejoice over its two millennia of Christian faith and meditate on the necessity and the manner of promoting its joyful announcement. I was just 17 years old and resided in São Paulo (Brazil). There, I participated in the Parish of Our Lady of Aparecida, of Boa Viagem (New World Park, São Paulo); in that year, the former parish priest had left to return to his native diocese of Lins, after three years of good service given to the Archdiocese of São Paulo. Until the arrival of a new priest to our small parish, we had a period of “emptiness”.

It was in this period that Fr. Nicolau Kohler, a Dehonian religious of the nearby Parish of Our Lady of Light (Nossa Senhora da Candelária) (Vila Maria, São Paulo), was elected to take on the celebrations and pastoral assistance until the arrival of a new pastor at the New World Park.

This priest, with all his energy, worked there for three months, living with his community. At this time, I, restless and young as I was, I trusted him with a secret: I wanted to be a priest, but I did not know where to begin!

In his next visit to the parish, he brought with him a book by Fr. Giuseppe Palermo SCJ, regarding the life of Fr. Dehon, and he told me: “Read it carefully and if you like it, we can talk further regarding this!”

That is exactly what I did: I devoured the book and wanted to immediately converse with him. I was very interested in Fr. Dehon and the congregation founded by him.

Much more than that, I was delighted to understand that God was inviting me to be part of a family whose initiator encountered difficulties at being understood in his vocation, even by close relatives. In 2003, I told my mother for the first time of my desire to be a priest. Not only did I receive a firm ‘no’, but in truth, my mother was very disappointed, telling me that my real intention was to abandon her. She did not accept it and promised not to help me.

At the time of my life I was studying dentistry at the Paulista State University, in San José dos Campos. My dear mother dreamt that one of her children would one day be a doctor, and for this she worked constantly, since my father had already died. My will was to do otherwise than what my mother and my brother, who was nine years older than me, wanted.

What a surprise I felt when I realized that Divine Providence was preparing a spiritual father for me who had a similar story!

Fr. Dehon was confronted with many ‘no’s’ from his Father, Jules. This jealous father, like my mother, faced thousands of experiences (and what good experiences!) to move his child’s life forward in terms of studies and professional future. Fr. Dehon also became a doctor, with a great future in civil law, prior to entering the seminary. Given that a vocation comes as a secret from God for the one who Dehon experience it, it is at the same time a mystery to those who are supportive in one’s life, even more so, when it concerns a beloved child. I know that the God who accompanied

the life of Fr. Dehon was also willing to accompany me as well. Without the acceptance of my family members, I became a surgical-dentist in December 2005. I entered the Dehonian Taubaté seminary in February 2006. My family members today recognize the joy that I feel of being religious and preparing myself for the priestly life; they are the ones who say so. But I had to accept the challenge of faith, which is worth facing with wisdom and discernment, but also with openness and courage that God gives to us.

Dehonian Charism is a lighter road of Christian living and a good occasion to read the pages of the Gospel with the optics of love and the desire to repair the wounds of every heart and of the world. I am happy and witness firmly that this charism, so apropos for today, can be part of the lives of many people, including those who are reading this small testimony. I entrust you, reader, to the one to Whom I have entrusted my life, the Sacred Heart of Jesus. He who calls us is also trustworthy to support us on the pathways on which He invites us to go. Courage!

(Testimony of Fr. Eduardo Nunes Pugliesi SCJ, student of theology at the Faculty Dehonian, Taubate, Sao Paolo, Brazil).

D. Discussion Points

How can a Lay person/a Dehonian concretely live the mysticism of the “oblate life”?

- *In the family...*
- *At work...*
- *Participating in the Church...*
- *In society...*

E. A Moment of Prayer

1. Welcome

P: In the name of the father, and the son, and the Holy Spirit

All: *Amen.*

P: Here I am, O God!

All: *I have come to do your will.*

2. Hymn (one's choice)

3. Meditation

P: Jesus lived for others, in obedience to the Father.

All: *“Here I am, O God, I come to do your will” (Heb 10:7).*

P: Animated by the Holy Spirit, he announced the Good News of the Kingdom of God, healing, forgiving and welcoming everyone:

All: *“The spirit of the Lord is upon me; for this purpose I have consecrated myself, he has sent me to announce a joyful message, to proclaim to prisoners freedom and to blind the sight; to set at liberty those who are oppressed, and to proclaim a year of favor from the Lord (Lk 4:18-19).*

P: In everything He was equal to us, except in sin.

All: *He worked with human hands; He thought with human intelligence; He loved with a human heart (GS 22).*

P: In kindly acts, attitudes and words of Jesus, let us recognize the heart of God himself:

All: *“We recognize the love that God has for us, and we believe in this love” (1Jn 4:16).*

P: *Fr. Dehon saw in Christ all the love, goodness and mercy of God the Father.*

All: *The creative love of God becomes salvation and presence in the Heart of Jesus Christ. In his life time Jesus showed, in his closeness to the people, how much God loves all. He was faithful until the end. For this He accepted the cross and there, His heart was opened by a Lance: a heart open to all... Heart—Fountain... to pour out water and blood, symbols of Baptism and of the Eucharist.*

4. Dehonian Psalm (alternate verses)

“This life that I live, I live in the faith of the Son of God,
who loved me and gave himself up for me” (Gal 2:20).

For Fr. Dehon, the pierced Heart of Jesus
is the expression of love that he himself experienced during his lifetime.

Salvation comes to us from this heart faithful and obedient,
despite the risks and the cross.

From the Heart of Christ, opened on the cross
a new humanity is born.

A community of brothers, new and prophetic,
built on love and justice which comes from God.

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit.
as it was in the beginning, now and forever,
world without end. Amen.

5. Word of God (Jn 10:32-38) *Jesus said to them: “I have done many good deeds in your presence which the Father gave me to do; for which of one of these do you want to stone me?” They answered, “We do not want to stone you because of any good deeds, but because of your blasphemy! You are only a man, but you are trying to make yourself God!” Jesus answered, “It is written in your own Law that God said, You are gods. We know that what the scripture says is true always; and God called those people gods, the people to whom his message was given. As for me, the Father shows me and sent me into the world. How then, can you say that I blaspheme because I said that I am the Son of God? Do not believe me then, if I am not doing the things my Father wants me to do. But if I do them, even though you do not believe me, you should at least believe my deeds, in order that you may know once and for all that the Father is in me and that I am in the Father.”*

6. Response

P: The open heart is the outpouring of what is more intimate and precious: love, kindness, friendly and attentive presence of God.

All: *Heart of Jesus, wounded by love, teach us also to love.*

P: To contemplate the open Heart of the Savior is a demanding commitment:
It means to see the face Christ in the wounded faces one’s brothers.

All: *Heart of Jesus, We recognize you
in the broken heart of the small, the weak and the suffering.*

P: The heart of Christ is the altar of the new Covenant,
for the renewal of all men and the world.

*All: Heart of Jesus, the new world altar,
help us to live forgiveness, peace and justice.*

7. Prayer

United with the Heart of Jesus,
we offer ourselves to you, O God,
as prophets of love and builders of brotherhood.
May your love, present in us since Baptism,
transform our heart,
to love you and serve you more and more,
in the person of our brothers.
Through Christ, Our Lord.
Amen.

8. Final Hym

Literature

- Fr. Primo Corbelli SCJ. *A civilization of love*. Editorial Claret (Argentina).
- Pope Benedict XVI, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Sacramentum Caritatis* (2007), numbers [1](#), [64-67](#), [79](#), [88-92](#).

Meeting XIII
FAITH EXPERIENCE:
IN THE HEART OF THE WORLD – *ADVENIAT REGNUM TUUM*

Objectives of the Meeting

- Understand with Fr. Dehon that the spirituality of the Sacred Heart leads us to a life of reparation at a personal and social level: the second component of the Dehonian charism.
- Pass from contemplation to action and from action to contemplation in view of the kingdom of the Heart of Jesus in society.
- Assume that change in the world occurs through the transformation of hearts and by commitment to an effective search of a new world, the sign of the Kingdom of God.

Outline of the Meeting: strategies and activities

- This year’s topic: Fr. Dehon’s spiritual experience and our participation in this charismatic experience.
- After acknowledging the beginning of his faith with Baptism and the great significance that he attributed to it, we reflected on “oblation”, and now reflect on “reparation”, as an expression of *Adveniat Regnum Tuum – Thy kingdom come*. In other words, how to live it in the heart of the world.
- We begin with a text from the gospel and a text from Fr. Dehon; and we continue with a development of the repairing action of Fr. Dehon. Like us, Dehonians today can understand and participate in it.
- A few questions and teaching references inserted into the text should help whoever facilitates and guides the reflection towards its objectives.

Development of the Meeting

A. Welcome

Prepare the meeting room with a world map and a symbol of the Heart of Jesus (image, icon, Dehonian cross). Ask participants to think about today’s world: the beautiful things and not so beautiful things; things to conserve, things to promote; and things to repair, to transform. Ask: What would I change in my country, city, or town? Where should the transforming power of Christ’s Heart work in us?

Alternative: Project a map of today’s world; then a map of hunger (in the internet you can easily find a map that shows parts of the world where there are critical situations). Propose the questions indicated above.

B. Reflection: *Reparation in the Heart of the World*

1. A Text from the Bible (Lk 4:14-22)

“Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit and news of Him spread throughout the whole region. He taught in their synagogues and was praised by all. He came to Nazareth, where he had

grown up, and went according to his custom into the synagogue on the Sabbath day. He stood up to read and was handed a scroll of the prophet Isaiah. He unrolled the scroll and found the passage where it was written: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring glad tidings to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty of captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, and proclaim a year acceptable to the Lord’.

Rolling up the scroll, he handed it back to the attendant and sat down, and the eyes of all in the synagogue looked intently at him. He said to them, “Today this scripture passage is fulfilled in your hearing.” And all spoke highly of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his mouth. They also asked, “Isn’t this the son of Joseph?”

Jesus’ program: Anointed to announce the kingdom

The Letter of Saint Paul to the Philippians states that Jesus, *“though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God something to be grasped at. Rather, he emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, coming in human likeness; and found human in appearance; he humbled himself, becoming obedient to death, even death on a cross”* (Phil 2:6-8).

At Fr. Dehon’s funeral celebration, the Bishop of Soissons said about him: “when he arrived as a young priest at Saint Quentin after having obtained four doctorates (in civil and ecclesiastical law; philosophy and theology) and called to be stenographer at Vatican Council he, “like a true priest, instead of proudly enclosing himself in the ivory tower of his intellectual superiority, threw himself, body and soul, into ‘work’ and the cross.” This was his form of praying “Thy Kingdom Come”, praying by rolling up his sleeves. This is what Jesus defines as his mission; this is what Fr. Dehon assumed in his beloved France and in the world. Not only in prayer, but in his work-action and in promoting initiatives in favor of the Heart of Jesus in souls and in society.

2. A Text from Fr. Dehon

“The Kingdom of the Sacred Heart of Jesus in society is the Kingdom of Justice, Love, Mercy; of compassion to the little ones, the humble, and those who suffer. I ask that you dedicate yourselves to all of these works, to promote them and assist them.

Encourage all institutions to collaborate in favor of social justice and to prevent oppression of the fragile by the powerful.” (RSC 610)

Teaching suggestions: After having read both texts, propose a moment of silent reflection on this question: How do these texts complement each other? Then open a brief dialogue.

3. Theme for Reflection

3.1. From God’s Heart, to the heart of the world.

After probing the depths of the Dehonian charism, which is charitable availability, expressed in the “*Ecce Venio*” of Jesus and the *Ecce Ancilla* of Mary, we invite you to take another step: from the heart of God to the heart of the world.

The topic in this meeting places us in touch with some recent challenges of Pope Francis. The Pope insists on the missionary dimension of the church. But, what does it mean to be missionaries? In former times it meant to go to faraway lands to proclaim the Gospel. This is important and Fr. Dehon never tired of exhorting “it is necessary to go into the villages”, “it is necessary to support

foreign missions”. But the Pope reminds us that is not enough to go into villages, or faraway lands. “To go, it is necessary that we come out of ourselves”. To all this, what is getting out ‘of ourselves’ but the oblation availability? This before anything. And what is it to ‘come out’ of one-self without charitable availability?

This theme is derived from the previous. After having emptied oneself by means of oblation, we go to others and announce the new kingdom; we go to others with a message of brotherhood! We go from the Heart of God to the heart of the world with a reparative perspective. In all of this we are moved by the experience of the love of God seen in the Heart of Jesus: a visual manifestation. The first effort toward reparation should be our personal conversion. The closer we are to the Heart of Jesus, the better possibilities we will have to influence others and the world. With the merciful Heart of Jesus we are converted into prophets of love and ministers of reconciliation and reparation. There are no missionaries of small or large missions without the power of love. Jesus has been the prophet of love, for which He has also been the servant of reconciliation.

3.2. Union with Christ and proclamation of the Kingdom

In the contemplation of the open wound on the cross we find the most eloquent expression of love in which He gives Himself to the last drop for our salvation. From Heart to heart we live his intimacy as the source of all life. But we avoid ‘falling into’ intimacy; we don’t stop and consider mysticism. Our charism invites us to militancy. Whoever contemplates Jesus in the Eucharist should expect to find the disfigured face of Christ’s misery in so many brothers and sisters who are excluded and oppressed. Looking at the source of sin in society, we see that “Love is not loved”. Fr. Dehon thought about this situation and concluded that the cause of the wrongs that afflict society have more profound roots in not accepting the love of God. From here the ‘spiritual missionary’ is born and the passion for proclaiming the Kingdom of the Heart of Jesus to all people and society. He expressed this in his motto: *Adveniat Regnum Tuum* – Thy Kingdom Come. Let us go out to the world to transform it to make it more similar to the Kingdom of God. We ask that His Kingdom come to us, we proclaim and commit to working for it.

In our church, and in other religions, tendencies of ‘intimism’ (state of being intimate) and of activism are frequently manifested. Conflicts between contemplation and action, mysticism and politics. There are those who pray a lot and criticize those who work to make a better world; there are those who commit to activities to transform society and do not have time to pray... because they have a ‘lot to do’ for the Kingdom! Among these there are those who criticize Christians who pray a lot and do not have time for others.

3.3. Learning from Jesus

Jesus found this situation also among the Pharisees of His time. They had so many religious obligations and commandments to fulfill, that they had no time for those in need. A good example is the parable of the Good Samaritan, or the incident of the doctor of the law regarding the first commandment. (cf. Mk 8:28-34) Jesus, in His response, immediately recalls that two basic commandments exist. That is why, spontaneously, after having cited the first, ‘love God above all things’... immediately he offers the second, even though it had not been solicited: “love your neighbor as yourself,” and he adds, there is no greater commandment than this.

The practice of Jesus is clear, he is among the poor, he comes down to their needs, he goes to find the excluded, particularly the lepers. But by doing this he does not distance himself from

communion with the Father, and he desires to do everything to fulfill His will. He lifts himself up in prayer, at night or at dawn, he goes to the synagogue and to the temple, and shows His relationship with the Father at any given moment (cf. Mt 4:23; 14:23; Mk 9:2; Lk 4:46; 9:28; 11:1)

In Luke, Jesus's union with the Father is manifested in the word: "The spirit of the Lord has anointed me" and activity with the poor is indicated in Isaiah 61: Proclaim the Good News to the poor, free the captives, and give sight to the blind...

3.4. Learning from Fr. Dehon

Fr. Dehon knew how to cultivate two things: to take care of the little ones, the humble, the laborers and the poor; and how to cultivate meditation on the Word of God and Eucharistic Adoration. He knew that those who take responsibility only for the spiritual and those who take responsibility only for the social, run the risk of distancing themselves from the gospel.

Certainly we all have concrete examples, in our communities and families, of those who were only 'people of the church' and people that only work for social values. Today they have distanced themselves from the community; some have changed religion, others limit themselves to political militancy, others have lost the faith and desire to dedicate themselves to the poor; and others have assumed the life style they previously criticized and fought. But at the same time we know people that have persevered for a long time in prayer and work. For them we give thanks to God and we learn from them as we have learned from Fr. Dehon: The Kingdom of the Heart of Jesus in society and the Kingdom of justice, of love, of mercy and of compassion for the lowly, the humble and those who suffer.

With Fr. Dehon we have learned that one cannot persevere his/her whole life long in one counter-current effort, without an intimate union with the heart of Christ. According to Fr. Dehon, to repair was also to transform hearts, to transform people with the power and the joy of the Gospel. These are the people that transform the world so that it may be more fraternal and supportive, and so that in the world and in Him (Christ) we can all have a dignified life (cf. Jn 10:10).

3.5. Reparation beyond causes

By means of "reparative solidarity" that leads us to the heart of the world, we concluded with Fr. Dehon that the radical 'non acceptance' of the love of Christ "is the most profound cause of the wrongs in society at the personal, social and human level". This is the way today's SCJ constitutions express the social dimension of spirituality lived by Fr. Dehon (cf. Constitutions SCJ, n. 4). This is a kind of negative experience by which the love of God is arrived at: splitting in two, as it were, the face of Christ already disfigured in mankind by the sin of humanity.

Fr. Dehon was a doctor in civil rights and an expert in law. He knew the society in which he lived. In addition to his studies (degrees), he had a certain 'wisdom of the heart'; he knew that the greater evil in society was the 'negation' and the 'non-acceptance' of the love of God. That is why he had not spoken of a new doctrine or of a new revolutionary political party. He preached a new Kingdom, although it has existed for almost two thousand years, the Kingdom proclaimed by Christ built on mercy and justice, a Kingdom capable of converting and transforming all parties and ideologies, already so prevalent in this world.

3.6. *The Heart of Jesus and the transformation of society*

Fr. Dehon was very sensitive to the indifference toward the love of God, above all by priests and consecrated persons. Conscious of the ties of solidarity that unite the church as a family, as in the communion of Saints, he wanted to respond to the ‘scorned’ love of God; and, because he understood that this reparative union will contribute in an excellent way toward the restoration of the Kingdom of the Sacred Heart “in souls and in society”.

According to Fr. Dehon, “it is necessary that worship of the Sacred Heart, beginning with the mystical life in souls, should descend and penetrate into the social life of the people; from there will come the remedy for the cruel wrongs in our moral world” (ART-REV-1889-0200-8031001 [“Les opportunités du règne du Sacré Cœur”, in RCJ (Feb 1889)]). His social apostolate, mainly with the youth, laborers, and the poor, is marked by this principle that he accepted as his congregation’s motto: *Adveniat Regnum Tuum*. If oblation characterizes the first dimension of Dehonian spirituality, then solidarity and reparation complete this fundamental option. The offering of oneself implies in this union the reparative mission of Christ. Responding to a priest, who said that the founder wanted a congregation more of consolers than repairers, Fr. Dehon affirmed, “I have not wanted to create a community of consolers without reparation. I’ve wanted a community of reparation and of victims. I’ve never adopted the victim name; I’ve chosen the name of Oblates, which signifies the same thing. We are victim priests. Our own spirit is *spiritus amoris et immolationis* (spirit of love and immolation). Live well your act of oblation and you will be a good victim of the Sacred Heart”. (Letter to Fr. Guillaume, 18-02-1913; AD.B.44/7 [inv.751, 381])

3.7. *Reparation – Reconciliation*

Reparation is a soteriological notion of salvation, typical of the language common to the spirituality of the Sacred Heart. It is a form of expressing the complex reality of salvation. The present Dehonian Constitutions also use other words to express this same reality, for example: reconciliation, restoring, redemption, care and solidarity.

Fr. Dehon hopes his religious will be ‘prophets of love’ and ‘servants of reconciliation’ of people and the world (cf. 2Cor 5:18). This way, committed to Him to repair sin and the lack of love in the church and in the world, they will lend, with their lives, their prayers, works, sufferings and joys, “the worship of love and reparation that His heart desires” (Constitutions SCJ, nn. 4-7).

In another section the Constitutions SCJ say: “We understand reparation as a welcoming of the Spirit (cf. 1Thes 4:8), as a response of the love of Christ for us, a communion with his love of the Father and a cooperation of his redemptive work within the world” (n. 23). Here we have four points that help us live the experience of reparation that Fr. Dehon assumed as a program of life for himself. Every one of us is invited to follow this same path.

The welcoming of the Spirit – it’s a little surprising but perfectly comprehensible in a Dehonian vision: Jesus, whose heart we want to follow, was **a man always open to the Spirit**. He was conscious of having been “anointed by the Spirit” and by that act, with the power of the Spirit. And so, he produces the fruits of the Spirit. St. Paul tells us, in Galatians and Romans, what ‘living according to the Spirit’ consists of. (cf. Gal 5:22-23; Rom 8). We, sinners, live this spiritual struggle between the fruits of the spirit and the fruits of the flesh.

To the extent in which we are united with Christ, the balance of our spiritual lives will hang on the side of the fruits of the spirit and we will be ‘Christ-like’, who was known to be pleasing to God

(Rom 8:8). He lived according to the Spirit. This is why in the Eucharist we can say “God, Father of Mercy, give us the Spirit of love, the Spirit of your Son” (Eucharistic prayer V [Various needs]).

Fr. Dehon desired that his own life be a **response to Christ’s love**. That is why he sought union with his Heart (in prayer, in meditation of the Word and in the Eucharist) and produced such works that would transform hearts and the writings of society/world. In communion with Christ, in His love of the Father, he desired to contribute with all of his talent and all of his resources towards the redeeming work of Christ in the world, transforming it into a sign of the Kingdom of his Heart... from the Heart of God to the heart of the world.

3.8. Being with the people

Fr. Dehon, as he seeks to listen to the Heart of God and to know “the thoughts of His Heart” (cf. Mt 9:4; Heb 4:12; Gn 6:5), is also solicitous in listening to the people to know their spiritual and material needs. His spirituality is not intimistic: on the contrary, he invites the laity and priests to worry not only about worship, but also to go to the people. With this he unites himself with the call of Pope Leo XIII.

His pastoral method is born in part from this mystical ‘listening’ and in part from a prolonged and thorough gaze at reality. Normally he notes everything, with detail, for example, regarding the economy, politics and culture.

This contemplation of reality forms an integral part of his spiritual identity; in this way, education plays a significant mystical role. He himself said “Education, action and prayer are necessary; we have a need for teachers, of apostles and saints. We have a need for apostles: men of action. If the people do not come to us, we need to go to them.” (RSO 8/50.51)

Fr. Dehon did not use the expression of ‘pastoral conversion’, as in the document of Aparecida (Brazil) or of Pope Francis: and much less the expression “new evangelization” or “new mission” of the church. However the basic intuition was already present, for a century, in its way of conceiving the mission of the church: go out, go to the people, missions, social organizations, schools, print shops, publications, conferences and social places; his concern in the field of an educative apostolate finds its full meaning in this second dimension of his spirituality.

At this point we can ask ourselves: How can a lay person / a Dehonian accept this dimension of Charism? Could a lay person / a Dehonian not participate in any pastoral/social organization in the community, or belong to an association, or a transforming action of social life in the neighborhood, town, or city? How can one exercise the spirit of reparation in family or in the professional field?

3.9. Contemplation and transforming action

From contemplation and education, Fr. Dehon moves into social action, and naturally and sometimes surprisingly, he takes this step. If we think he had lived the most part of his life riding a horse, in 19th and 20th centuries, when the social doctrine of the church was initiating its formulation, and the language of the social pastoral was not at all a familiar thing in the church communities, a surprising affirmation like this one occurs: “Among us we have understood that alms giving is necessary in cases of extreme poverty and as a personal act of altruism. However, it is not in this way that social issues can be resolved; although the wealthy may be generous, their charity will always be an insufficient palliative. We demand normal working hours for men, for women and children. We ask for a minimum wage for all” (RSO 4/120).

The cited text refers to a time in which Labor Law was not consolidated; it was just beginning to be debated. Laws regarding minimum wage, hours of labor, social provision or child labor did not exist yet in most countries. At this point a question could be introduced regarding the date and period in which labor laws were consolidated in our country; to understand better Fr. Dehon's statements regarding just salaries, labor hours and conditions for women and children.

3.10. Social reparation

It is interesting to see how Fr. Dehon understands the insufficiency of alms giving: it is not just charity, but a minimum wage for all; it is necessary to distinguish what constitutes a right for all, from a favor and a work of charity. Justice is a duty, not a charitable option: this was a time in which it was necessary to work on being conscious of laborers and poor in general, because it is not generosity of the wealthy or the government that brings the social solution, but the organization of the minorities, the poor, the laborers.

When Fr. Dehon says "we demand jobs for the men, we demand a minimum wage for all", he is insisting that business owners and those in government be questioned, confronted and many times pressured to recognize the minimal rights of citizens. It is what trade unions and many associations and popular movements in all parts of the world have always done, but mainly at the end of the 19th century. Today you hear about lobbying and advocacy and the street demonstrations in our cities.

One of the topics of the *Rerum Novarum* Encyclical that Fr. Dehon propagated, by request of Pope Leo XIII, was specifically the right of founding 'associations'. The associations (of the neighborhoods, of professional groupings, such as trade unions, popular movements, cultural associations, recreation, political parties) which maintained the balance between individual weakness and the strength of the state, between the impotence of the poor and the power of the wealthy, which many times comes to be high-handed power and at other times comes to be omnipotence.

In this sense, to work for 'citizen's rights' is not a sin; it is not a subversion of social order, it is not a fight against business owners or the wealthy or against an established government.

On the contrary, it is a way of restoring social equality and reconciling peoples, social groups and organizations in conflict, so that all may have dignified life conditions. This is the reparation needed to reach solidarity and a fraternity in society that moves itself closer to a world of "brothers" loved by Jesus. Dom Helder Camara said: "When I feed the poor, they call me a saint. When I ask why they are poor, they call me communist." The idea that "if social injustice is not a sin, then sin does not exist," is attributed to Fr. Dehon.

Social reparation cannot be sustained, if later we do not return to the Eucharist, to the Word of God and contemplation. It is necessary to be men and women of prayer in order to have the prophetic courage of assuming reparation that will further be a social reconciliation or a transforming-action of the world. It is necessary to return to prayer to discern if the reparative action we are doing continues on the path of the Gospel and not merely the pathways of ideologies. To evangelize the poor with the proclamation of the Good News of Jesus, with our own personal testimony is the best reparation that we can offer with Christ to the Father in favor of a world that is more human and bonded.

C. Dehonian Testimony

I remember the first time I heard someone speak of Fr. Dehon. It was to a religious Dehonian, then a student of theology, today Fr. Sildo Cesar de Costa, from the SCJ Province BRM.

He invited me to participate in a group that had the mission of spreading the message of the Sacred Heart. I lived in a Dehonian parish—and I still live there— it has the Sacred Heart of Jesus as its patron. That invitation resounded in my heart with great serenity and I began to participate in the meetings.

At the beginning we were three young ladies, plus the Religious that shared the themes of the Dehonian spirituality, in a simple and clear form. Then I read many books about the Sacred Heart and about the life and work of Fr. Dehon. I was enthused by his Charism, his spirituality and the things he said about social issues. One phrase of Fr. Zezinho, that defines Fr. Dehon's way of life, was significant in my life: "whoever intends to change society cannot have timid ideas". Every time I thought of this phrase, it reminded me of Fr. Dehon, who fought for the rights of workers and for the less favored people of his time. I've heard it said many times of Fr. Dehon, that he was an ideal man for his time, and that surely he was advanced in his thinking.

Since that invitation I've become a young lay missionary and have developed this mission from 1997 to 2006 in a mission group called: The Young Dehonians I've worked as a lay missionary in missions in the city of Formiga-MG, Juara-MT and in my native city, Taubate-SP.

In looking at my story, I understand now that my spirituality, my way of seeing the world, the way in which I work pastorally. The way I relate to family and with people near me, it has been shaped by this experience of faith and the life of Fr. Dehon, modeled from the fount that I drank from, the Sacred Heart of Jesus. Then I was 18 years old. I am now 35.

The teachings of Fr. Dehon regarding oblation and reparation are always present in my life. I always think *in the Dehonian way of being*, with the phrase from Ezekiel: "I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh." (Ez 36:26).

I understand that in my life I want to have this message always present, because God has given me a new heart and with this I intend to be a sign of restoration and of reconciliation and of healing. I don't always know how to totally respond, but it is my daily search, and my heart's desire.

With the Dehonian Charism I have learned also to be persevering in my faith, trying to live the sacraments as channels of grace for my life. In the most difficult moments, due to sicknesses in the family and the death of family members, I've always had much confidence in the plans God has designed for me and I have not abandoned the faith. When my father was sick, years ago, I remember I was afraid and I (and my family) didn't know what to do. We prayed and entrusted God with the grace of healing my father. It wasn't easy to support myself, I didn't have the possibility of paying my monthly bills, and I remember I prayed for this grace. Various persons supported me and later I had the possibility of obtaining funds for an integral education. When I finally earned my degree, I praised the Lord who had helped me persevere. My final thesis was regarding bioethics, a topic in which I have done research and reflected upon in order to later speak on the importance of the defense of life and the dignity of the human being. In my project I've written that, thanks to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, I've been able to receive this grace in my life.

At a professional level I've worked in a religious environment. Throughout 13 years in my parish of Taubate I've been the parish secretary. Today I am a journalist in the National Sanctuary of Aparecida. In my professional work, I've always been able to exercise my apostolate with freedom and joy. Now I feel that I can realize many things for the Kingdom of the Heart of Jesus in souls and in society, by writing material regarding the Catholic Church in my professional job.

For all of these things in my life, I feel I am a person who has received a great deal from God, because I've come to know a spirituality so strong and at the same time so serene. Strong because it pushes me to fight for a new world, a world of brotherhood, of social justice and of peace which stimulates me to live a 'restless faith', as Fr. Zezinho says. Serene because to live the experience of being loved by the Sacred Heart of Jesus calms us and gives us the security that in His immense love we are all welcomed and very much loved.

(Elisangela Cavaleiro, Taubate—SP, Brasil)

D. Discussion Points

In which way can a lay person concretely live the mystique of "reparative solidarity": in family, at work, in life in the church and in society?

E. A Moment of Prayer

1. Initial Greeting

P: In the name of the Father, of the Son and of the Holy Spirit

All: *Amen*

P: The Spirit of the Lord has consecrated me and has sent me!

All: *Woe to me if I do not preach the Gospel!* (1Cor 9:16)

2. Hymn (one's choice)

3. Meditation

P: Laity, religious, ministers: we are all consecrated for one mission. Baptism has made us messengers of the Gospel and ambassadors of the Kingdom.

All: *"Go and make disciples of all nations"* (Mt 28:19)

P: All Christians, men, youth, women, we are missionaries. We are not in the world to create a comfortable and secure refuge for ourselves. We are in the world to plant the Word that saves and frees.

All: *"If I preach the gospel, this is no reason for me to boast, for an obligation has been imposed on me and woe to me if I do not preach it!"* (1 Cor 9:16)

P: As evangelizers we accept our society and our period of time with everything it contains: its difficulties and dreams, its pains and conquests, its problems and hopes. We can evangelize only what we have accepted.

All: *"Behold, I am sending you like lambs among wolves. But take courage, I have conquered the world."* (Lk 10:3; Jn 16:33)

P: Fr. Dehon knew how to see and listen attentively to the society of his time. He was close to many people of diverse social classes. He did not run from the problems, but analyzed everything in the light of faith. He studied, worked and prayed a great deal.

All: *“Fr. Dehon has been the priest of which his time was in need.”* (Paul VI)

P: Following the example of the apostle Paul, Fr. Dehon dialogued and listened to all: laborers, youth, women, religious, priests and professionals. He wrote many articles; founded a newspaper and a magazine and spoke in a strong and bold way. He made himself everything to everyone, as a result of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

4. Word of God (1Cor 9:19-23)

“Although I am free in regard to all, I have made myself a slave to all so as to win over as many as possible. To the Jews I became like a Jew to win over Jews; to those under the law I became like one under the law—though I myself am not under the law – to win over those under the law. To those outside the law I became like one outside the law – though I am not outside God’s law but within the law of Christ—to win over those outside the law. To the weak I became weak, to win over the weak. I have become all things to all, to save at least some. All this I do for the sake of the gospel, so that I too may have a share in it.”

5. Responsorial (Rm 10:14-15)

P: How beautiful are the feet of the messenger who announces peace!

All: *How beautiful are the feet of the messenger who announces peace!*

P: How will I call on the Lord?

All: *If I do not know Him?*

P: And how will I believe in the Lord?

All: *If no one proclaims Him?*

P: And how will I be able to proclaim Him?

All: *If I have not been invited?*

P: Therefore I say:

All: *Here I am, Lord. Send me.*

6. Act of Missionary Oblation

P: With the words of Fr. Dehon, let us pray to God for the world:

R2 “There is a need for education, action and prayer. We need teachers, apostles and saints. If the people do not come to us, then, we have to go to the people. (RSO 8/50.51)

All: *Here I am, Lord. Send me.*

R3 “The priest should be a man of his time; always loyal to the Church, he should speak the language of his time and study the serious problems that disturb” (ART-REV-1901-0700-8031095/9 [“L’action social du clergé”, in *RCJ* (July 1901)]).

All: *Here I am, Lord. Send me.*

R4 “A Christian society should be organized in a way that the workers turn to charity toward others as least as possible. Institutions and funds should exist to help larger families and those

without work should exist. This help for the honest worker is very different from alms given to the poor.”

All: Here I am, Lord. Send me.

R1 “If social injustice is not a sin, then sin does not exist”.

All: Here I am, Lord. Send me.

R2 “The laity should be salt of the earth and the light of social life: we are in a world where, for two hundred years, we have distorted what it is to be a true apostolate: we error when we excuse ourselves due to prudence and we say it is not possible... that moderation is needed” (MSO 393.394).

All: Here I am, Lord. Send me.

R3 “New necessities demand new actions: It is necessary that the church know how to show that it is not only capable of forming pious souls, but also capable of making justice reign, of which we are all hungry for” (RSO 8/45)

All: Here I am, Lord. Send me.

R4 “We have studied the moral causes of our great crisis. The first cause we have found is religious and doctrinal rejection: God is lacking in society” (RSO 2/39);

All: Here I am, Lord. Send me.

7. Prayer

To the weary heart of the world you send us forth as prophets. To the misguided heart of the world you send us forth as a light. To the divided heart of the world you send us forth as reconcilers. Help us, Lord, with the grace of your Spirit, so that we may remain loyal to the calling received. Amen.

8. Final Hymn

Literature

- Pontifical Council for “Justice and Peace”, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* (2004), read [number 541](#).

Meeting XIV
**THE FAITH EXPERIENCE OF FR. DEHON:
COMMUNION – *SINT UNUM***

Objectives of the Meeting

- To recognize the meaning of *Sint Unum* in the Dehonian charism and its different dimensions: communication with God, oneself, others, the world.
- To help to grasp that communion is already mission.
- To motivate the development of communion in the family, the community, at work and in society as Dehonian mission and as a necessity in a world that is divided and wounded by individualism.

Outline of the Meeting: strategies and activities

- In the last meeting on the baptism of Fr. Dehon we discovered his availability to oblation (*Ecce Venio*) and his reparatory solidarity (*Adveniat Regnum Tuum*). Now we pass to a new aspect of the Dehonian charism, namely, communion (*Sint Unum*).
- We will develop the theme by starting with the High Priestly prayer of Jesus and looking at the importance given by Fr. Dehon and the church today after Vatican II and Pope Francis to the spirituality of communion and the culture of encounter.
- After the meetings that we completed, let us deepen the spiritual sense of communion with a reference to the church in its efforts to reconcile the world in Christ. Today we are called to live a “culture of encounter” in the words of Pope Francis: in the family, our neighborhood, schools, our society, politics, solidarity with the poor, with workers... with God and with ourselves.
- Fr. Dehon formulated this task through the last will of Jesus: the *Sint Unum*, one of his favorite norms.

Development of the Meeting

A. Welcome

After the greeting it would be good to propose a brief initial prayer holding each other's hands as a gesture of communion. This will be followed immediately by a moment of sharing in two's, on some aspect of one's personal life, for example, about your day, your week, about your family to lead to a sign of communion (linking hands or raising one's arms with joined hands...) while listening to the words “because we are united, all of us”.

B. Reflection: *Faith Experience – Communion – Sint Unum*

1. A Text from the Bible (Jn 17:11-26)

From the Gospel according to John

“Holy Father, protect them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one, as we are one. While I was with them, I protected them in your name that you have given me. I guarded them, and not one of them was lost except the one destined to be lost, so that the scripture might be

fulfilled. But now I am coming to you, and I speak these things in the world so that they may have my joy made complete in themselves. I have given them your word, and the world has hated them because they do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world. I am not asking you to take them out of the world, but I ask you to protect them from the evil one. They do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world. Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth. As you have sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. And for their sakes I sanctify myself, so that they also may be sanctified in truth.

‘I ask not only on behalf of these, but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. The glory that you have given me I have given them, so that they may be one, as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become completely one, so that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me. Father, I desire that those also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory, which you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world.

‘Righteous Father, the world does not know you, but I know you; and these know that you have sent me. I made your name known to them, and I will make it known, so that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them.’”

The preoccupation of Jesus

Jesus, human like us in all things but sin, knew well the nature of humans. Despite the fact that he had been the person who formed his disciples, he knew that they were still weak, that they could not understand, could not work together with one another, that they easily separated. He also knew that the witness of unity was fundamental to the mission he was giving them. Jesus had just finished making the gesture of the washing of the feet, a powerful sign, shocking to Peter, and now, despite all that, he makes this prayer. He was clearly very preoccupied with the future of his mission of which they were to be the first proclaimers. If they were secure in all the things that he wished them to transmit, his mission would be affirmed. That was the reason for the washing of the feet so that they would never forget the essential lesson: to serve. Not alone! To serve together. To serve in union with God and their brothers. *“I have given them an example, so that they may do as I have done.”* (Jn 13:15) And I give them a witness of the trinitarian communion, the model of all communion: *“As you Father are in me and I in you, so that the world may believe.”*

Jesus showed the preoccupation of all leaders (fathers of a family, the founders of an important work...) He is about to leave their people and says to himself: “What can I yet do, seeing that I have only a little time.” What remains, perhaps, is only a prayer. And in the prayer, he leaves a guiding message to strengthen his mission: *May they be one*. It is not the achievement of a goal in a certain amount of time which guarantees unity, but love which beats in the hearts of each one of us and which circulates among us, among the disciples and with God. “God is love” (1Jn 4:16) The search for communion was in the heart of Jesus a long time before the last supper. It seems that also the adversaries of Jesus understood the importance of *Sint Unum* in the project of his life. It is interesting that Caiphas presented, without knowing it, the plan of God for the mission of Jesus. We find in Jn 11:52 of the Gospel a reflection on what Caiphas had said: *“He did not say this on his own, but being high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus was about to die for the nation, and not for the nation only, but to gather into one the dispersed children of God.”* John said that the words of the High Priest became a revelation of God, not only for the Jews, revealing that *“that all*

things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose.” (Rm 8:28) even with all our calculations. The proposal to reunite all the dispersed is beautifully refigured in the image of the Good Shepherd (Jn 10), in the image of the sheepfold, the gateway, of the enclosure. All of these help to understand the objective of communion, which was clearly pointed out in the priestly prayer and in the institution of the Eucharist.

2. A Text from Fr. Dehon

In a reflection on this text, Fr. Dehon wrote:

“With this prayer to God his Father, Our Lord indicated the full union which we ought to have with the Holy Trinity and in a special manner with him... Let us not forget the condition of this union: it is a free gift, a work of grace... Let us always seek this union which is the condition of all supernatural life... Let us avoid all that is contrary to this life. The best place for this union is your divine Heart. I understand this union as the source of all spiritual life.” (ASC 4/256.257.258)

Commentary

May we be one is one of the most important phrases of the Gospel according to Fr. Dehon, and a text he frequently quoted and recommended. Fr. Dehon had a clear preference for the Gospel of John. According to Fr. Perroux, Fr. Dehon quoted Chapters 13 to 17 more than 700 times. In these chapters we find the references to Sint Unum. He quoted verses 17.11 and 17.21-23 more than 70 times. In these verses there is a direct mention of this unity and charity. Moreover, in his book *Year with the Sacred Heart* he reflected at length on these five chapters. Again in his *Testament of the Sacred Heart* in his *Year with the Sacred Heart* there are 19 meditations on the topic. Three of these meditations are on Chapter 17: the meditations for day 24, 27 and 29 of April⁴.

3. Theme for Reflection

3.1. Communion and the Dehonian charism

After speaking of oblation and reparation in the previous meetings, the third structuring point of Fr. Dehon’s spirituality is his sense of communion. Lay people and religious are consecrated by means of baptism and they are called to live a life of union with Christ in the church.

This sense of communion has its origin in the commandment to love God above all and to love one’s neighbor as oneself (Mt 22:39). Love lets us cooperate with the other, to work together, to pardon, to re-establish relationships and to reconcile with God and with one another, in the family, in the Church and in society. And love constructs communion and reconstructs it after a break. Communion is the fundamental attitude allowing us to see the other as an integral part of oneself. That implies the Absolute Other (God), the other as my brother and sister, the other as world, as nature, as cosmos.

Communion is like the principle and the goal of our mission. It is already by itself a mission: *so that the world may believe*. In communion all Dehonians, lay, or religious, stimulated by the prayer of Jesus “*that all may be one*” can grow in their search for communion with God, with themselves, with their neighbor and with the world.

The communion of the Christian is the consequence of his or her union with the oblation of Christ. The oblation of Christ is his gift of life to the Father for humans. The reparation which can be

⁴ See A. PERROUX, “La prière de Jésus Sint Unum dans le projet du P. Dehon”, *Dehoniana* 1 (1997) 46.

translated as reconciliation, seeks to re-establish communion where it was lost. It means to re-establish communion with God, with the other, with oneself and with the universe. Fr. Dehon as well as many other mystics, before and after him, have deepened this dimension of the Gospel following the contemplation of the person of Jesus and his mission.

The disciples must maintain their unity, not just to be united, but *so that the world may believe*. But how? In the manner of Jesus and the Father with the Holy Spirit. Even though there is no clear reference to the Holy Spirit, there is no doubt that Jesus acts and prays under the impulse of the Spirit and with the power of the Spirit, as we find it frequently written in the Gospel (see Lk 3:21; 4:1f.; 4:16). The trinitarian communion is the source of all communion, from which the disciples need to draw inspiration throughout their lives.

3.2. Communion with God, the life of union with Christ

In the above-quoted text - “With this prayer to God his Father, Our Lord indicated the full union which we ought to have with the Holy Trinity and in a special manner with him...” (ASC 4/256) – It is clear that the union of the Christian comes from the communion with the Trinity. In it one arrives in a very concrete way at a personal intimacy with Christ. We dwell in Christ from the time of our baptism. But Christ is not separate from the Father, nor from the Holy Spirit. In all this, one desires to fulfill the will of the Father (Jn 4:34; 6:38; 17:24). From him comes forth living water, the “*Spirit who gives life*.” (see Jn 7:38)

For Fr. Dehon the fundamental experience of faith comes from the contemplation of the crucified one. It is there that he saw the infinite love of the pierced heart, from which poured blood and water. Here he found the One who “*loved me and has given his life for me*” (Gal 2:20). To this heart, Fr. Dehon wished to remain united his whole life. The deepening of this communion was his constant search. In several moments of his life he wrote in his diary thoughts like these: “I only want to live in union with Our Lord. All the rest leads to dispersion. My soul would be like a ship without a rudder.” (NQT 4/3)

In communion – new relations

In this communion he found the strength for intense apostolic endeavor, joy in prayer, comfort in the celebration of the Eucharist and Eucharistic adoration, in the meditation of the Word, in daily life with all its challenges, problems and hopes. In this communion he acquired a new sense of relationships with people in the church and society, with family and with members of the congregation which he had founded and had administered with all diligence. His union with Christ is characterized by his union with the Heart of Jesus, the heart that symbolized the person of Jesus offering himself (oblation) for the realization of the Father’s project (reparation).

How to maintain and nourish communion?

Fr. Dehon understood that there were conditions for this union to grow: an evangelical life in accordance with the beatitudes, a life totally dedicated to God and neighbor, especially with the poor. Right from the start in Saint Quentin he was overwhelmed by the situation of poverty, found among the working classes, who were without means and even more with the laws to defend their rights.

The union with Christ led him to take on the same attitudes of Christ the Shepherd, attentive to all the necessities of his flock. With the force of union, he who had himself come from a higher living standard, was able to get in touch with the poorest. Service of them brought on the Congregation.

On it he spent his inheritance. Even though this earned him a lot of criticism from his family, he did not stop and continued to build the Reign of His Heart in souls and societies.

In moments of trial, such as when the Congregation was suppressed or before the incomprehension of the confreres, or before the political decisions of his country in the area of education and of the church in general, his union with Christ continued to comfort him. In the face of difficulties, he often questioned himself about his own fidelity in this spiritual path. He asked himself often if these difficulties did not come from his own inability, that he was insufficient in his gift of self to God, too much unlike the gift of self of the Heart of Jesus.

Communion and spiritual growth

On this path he advanced both humanly and spiritually. Like St. Paul, he constantly sought to become a new man (Eph 2:15), a new creature (2Cor 5:27; Gal 6:15). In this union with the Heart of Jesus all became new.

Fr. Dehon grew spiritually to the point of becoming a person known as gentle and attentive to others. Those who lived with him began to call him the “très bon père”. This cordial and human trait was recognized by all who met him, not only the seminarians and novices, who would call him this out of respect or reverence. An editorial of the newspaper *Le Guetteur de l’Aisne*, in its comment on the life of Dehon a few days after his death wrote, “He was a gentle person right to the end of his life” (26.08.25).

Can we also grow in this union with the Heart of Jesus like Fr. Dehon? How?

3.3. Communion with oneself

Jn 17:22: Be perfect in unity.

Jesus could ask this of his Father for others (for us), he himself was “*perfect in unity*”. The words “*Be one*” has the authority of him who is ONE. ONE with the Father, ONE with the disciples, with the poor, with all, ONE with himself, totally together in his actions, doings and speaking, to the point that people were full of admiration and said: This One, “*teaches with authority*” (Mt 7:28-29; Jn 7:45-46).

His authority was confirmed in the mercy with which he welcomed and dealt with people. He affirmed every one: women, children, the sick, sinners, the deaf, paralytics, lepers, the poor, the rich, fishers and soldiers. He had no fear of touching the sick, to talk with women, to respond to the challenges thrown at him by the Pharisees or to those who condemned him to death.

He was a free man who proclaimed the love of the Father, who denounced the way religion had become distant, admonished all who need to be admonished. He was an authentic person in whom there was no falsehood. From him one wants to learn. He was the same before the Father as he was in the presence of the disciples, the Pharisees, sinner, the excluded. His heart was open to all long before it was opened by the lance of the soldier. To this heart, Fr. Dehon wanted to united; through it he wished to be transformed, and, in turn, to help others to be transformed into a new creature.

Fraternity and personal maturity

In every family, ecclesial movement, pastoral group, charitable organization or circle of friends the more harmonious, charitable or in solidarity, the more together, balanced and mature the persons in the group will be. The more someone knows and recognizes his or her limits and possibilities (the

ancients already recommended: "know yourself") the more he or she will contribute to the growth of the other in family or social group.

In a family the relations between parents and teenagers are always one of the great challenges, because teenagers are persons on the road to maturity; they are not yet mature, not yet capable of being always coherent. Mature parents know how to confront the immaturity of their teenage children better than immature parents. To the Christians of Ephesus (see Eph 4:13) Paul gives an image of growth to maturity: "*until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ.*" He knows that the greater part of humans is far removed from this ideal and perhaps will never get to '*come to the measure of the full stature of Christ*'. But in the same manner that Jesus asks "*be one*", so also Paul is challenged to grow into the maturity of Christ.

In adolescence we still live the contradictions and the selfishness of the infantile world and the desire to be useful and to contribute to the transformation of our internal world: the dream of a better world is part of the adolescent world and becomes the goal of the Christian youth. This grows into the mission of service that will grow to the extent that we become Christian adults. The Letter of Paul to the Ephesians (4:14-16) continues by saying: "*We must no longer be children, tossed to and fro and blown about by every wind of doctrine, by people's trickery, by their craftiness in deceitful scheming. But speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and knitted together by every ligament with which it is equipped, as each part is working properly, promotes the body's growth in building itself up in love.*"

To love and serve

Maturity is measured by the ability to love and to serve. In this Jesus himself was simply GREAT, simply MATURE: he became a servant for us to the end, to his death on the cross. Total oblation: that was the inspiring model for Fr. Dehon and his followers.

Beyond the communities familiar to us, in whatever group we take part, the maturity of each one, based on the service to Christ, is a true gift for the community. Each one contributes to build up the community and makes it realize its mission. Jesus said to Peter: "*And you, after your conversion, confirm your brothers.*" (Lk 22:32) What he meant, I think, was that the more you are converted, the more you are united with me, the better you can strengthen and lead your brothers and sisters.

Be perfect in unity

The conditions for being *perfect in unity* is the interior harmony which permits and reveals the balance between being and doing. There is no lack in everyone's life of the difficulties and temptations that lead to a double life, unfaithful to one's project of life, to spiritual growth, to marital and familial compromises, to loyalty and honesty at work, to the proper use of money, etc.

Fr. Dehon constantly sought to find this coherence in his following of Christ, especially in his efforts to deepen his union with his Lord. He fully knew the obstacles in living this union to the full. He knew what would distance him from God, all that would divide him, all the forms of sin, all the ways of loving what was in opposition to the Lord. For this reason, in his Eucharistic adoration and in his meditation on the Word, he always sought to re-orient the sense of direction of his life, to continue to focus on the love of the Heart of Christ which has loved so much.

3.4. Fraternal communion

Let us turn again to the Gospel text: “*So that they may be one, as we are one. I in them and you in me, that they may become completely one, that the world may that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.*” (Jn 17.22-23)

From the union of the disciples with God devolves the union of men and women among them. The notion of fraternal communion received a new force through the spirituality of communion of Vatican II. The church is communion and each cell of the church has the mission to live this communion. All the small communities which are part of a parish are called to this fraternal life, in accordance with the prayer of Jesus at the Last Supper: *May they be one... may they be perfectly one.* The first disciples were clear about this: they re-united in a community in line with the Word that they had been given, namely, the proclamation of the dead and risen Jesus. The book of the Acts of the Apostles in chapters two and four has a good description of the style of this community. Four points re-enforced the fraternal communion: the listening to the Word, the breaking of the bread, prayer together and the sharing of life, to such an extent that it says: “... *there was not a needy person among them.*”

Fr. Dehon referred to these two aspects in a commentary at the sixth Congress of the Cercle des Ouvriers. In a letter to a lay friend, Mr. Julien, with whom he worked together in the social initiatives of the parish in Saint Quentin (1873) he wrote: “There is here one heart and one soul as there needs to exist among the disciples of Christ. And we are realizing it in all its perfection in our motto: that all *may be one*” (28.08.1873).⁵

Fraternal communion and solidarity with the poor:

Fraternity, according to Fr. Dehon, goes much further than the communion of those who live in community or of those who are well off in life: “following the example of the Heart of Jesus, we must participate in all the sufferings of our brothers and sisters. And just as we are “one heart and one soul” in the Heart of Jesus, and just as the Heart of Jesus is at the same time our heart and the heart of others, so also we must be in some way the heart of all our brothers and sisters.” (CAM 1/250)

How does a lay Dehonian of today live fraternal communion? (It is possible to initiate a sharing here. One can begin, for example, to propose the various modes of fraternal life, such as the family, the lay Dehonian group, other pastoral groups, the world of work and the participation in civil society).

3.5. Communion with the created world through God

Fraternal communion which follows the *may they be one* goes much further than the fraternity of the family, of neighbors, fellow parishioners or colleagues of the same pastoral group. Just as parents make every effort to guarantee the future of their children or grandchildren, the followers of Christ preoccupy themselves with the future of humanity, with the next generation. For this reason, he or she will pay attention and give care to the neighborhood, the city, the nation and the environment, so that the next generation can have a healthy life, clean air, drinkable water, just laws, freedom for personal growth, so that ... as Jesus the Good Shepherd wanted “*all have life in abundance*” (Jn 10:10). Our mission is to reunite in unity all the dispersed children of God and to

⁵ See A. Perroux, “La prière de Jésus Sint Unum dans le projet du P. Dehon”, *Dehoniana I* (1997) p. 72.

bring together under Christ all that exists in heaven and on earth (see Eph 1:10) and thus to “make Christ the heart of the world” (Liturgy of the Hours, Vespers of Monday Week II, Antiphon #3).

The preoccupation with ecology cannot be only in view of a special species of aquatic animal or with an animal of the forest or a specific species of plants. In the Christian vision, the ecological equilibrium is a good for all humanity. It is a question of solidarity and a lifetime guarantee for generations. Without the gospel it is easy to fall into the tendency to preserve a specific animal over humans. There are spouses who have chosen not to have children because it is easier to keep an animal and to receive affection from it rather than from children. Animals create a reciprocal dependence. It is easy to subject them, condition them, force them into a type of fidelity. Children, on the other hand, must be brought up to take up their own life, freedom and creativity that will lead them to help and transform this world into a “better world”.

C. Dehonian Testimony

For many years I was part of the parish of the Sacred Heart of Jesus at Méier, Rio de Janeiro. I remember how happy I was with a team, with a priest with a serene face, friendly, who radiated great peace. I knew nothing about him...

Time passed by

In the month of January 1991, one of my children was invited to preach the Gospel as a Dehonian missionary, in Mondai SC, together with a friend of the parish which was a Dehonian mission. After the return of the two young people with a lot of material from their work, I began to study and get to know Fr. Dehon.

Thus I began with a study of the portrait which became a contemplation of a noteworthy life, marked by holiness, courage, audacity, ideals of justice, dignity, changes of harmful structures. It allowed me to see a person full of social and religious accomplishments. Fr. Dehon and his love for the heart of Jesus transformed my life. Through my knowledge of the work and life of Fr. Dehon, I began to live his spirituality. I received the strength to confront the challenges of my life journey, as a woman, as a widow, as a mother of three children, daughter of an elderly mother who was bed-ridden, professor, citizen and Christian, because “whoever wants to change the world cannot have timid ideas” as Fr. Dehon once said. I succeeded in bettering and deepening my way of being and thinking in relation to the Church and the society in which I loved, getting involved with the poor, the sick, the aged and children. I sought to deepen my relation with the Word of God and my love of the Eucharist.

The spirit of oblation became a daily act of my life. In every moment or circumstance, I gave myself interiorly to the Heart of Jesus who is the refuge, the consolation and the strength of my journey.

My behavior, the fruit of my Dehonian experience, drew the attention of the people with whom I shared a prayer group. I was invited by a lay Dehonian friend to become involved with the Dehonian Family. I made my first promise in 2001. My “yes” crowned an option I had made a long time ago to follow Jesus, *the prophet of love* and Fr. Dehon which I have made my own, and with the trust and love in the merciful Heart of Jesus.

I conclude my testimony with a word of the great prophet Leo John Dehon: “I have looked for some dominant note in my life: the devotion to the Heart of Jesus. It allows me to conform to his will, union with him and the life of love.”

(Nancy Bayma Salles, Lay Dehonian, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil).

D. Discussion Points

How can a lay Dehonian live concretely the mystic of communion in family, at work, in the life of the church, in society: participation in its organization, in the exercise of citizenship, in a solidarity with the poor?

E. A moment of Prayer

1. Greeting

L. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit

All Amen!

L. Let us acknowledge the love of God for us!

All In him we believe and give witness (1Jn 4:16)

2. Hymn

(Choose a hymn from your repertoire)

Shared Meditation

R. The example of Fr. Dehon animates us to give witness to the Gospel in the community of our brothers and sisters, which is the Church:

All “May all be one, so that the world may believe” (Jn 17:21)

R. From the Heart of Christ, opened on the cross, there poured out blood and water, the symbols of Baptism and the Eucharist, the sacraments of Christian life.

All “There is one faith, one Lord and one Baptism” (Eph 4:5)

R. In the community we share in the gift of faith, which strengthens us day after day and feeds our hope. Faith gives direction to our life and thus lets us leave everything to follow Christ.

All “So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation.” (2Cor 5:17)

R. The Church is our house. In it we are reborn in baptism, in it we give witness to the Gospel, in it we celebrate the Eucharist and share in the bread and the wine.

All “Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body: for we all partake of the one bread.” (1Cor 10:17)

R. To live in community is to live as Jesus saw it: in service, dialogue, availability. It is to live our “oblation”: the gift of self for the good of all, especially for the humble ones and those who suffer.

All “By this they will know that you are my disciples: if you have love one for the other.” (Jn 13.35)

Word of God (Jn 15:1-5)

“At that time, Jesus said to them: ‘I am the true vine, and my Father is the vine-grower. He removes every branch in me that bears no fruit. Every branch that bears fruit he prunes to make it bear more fruit. You have already been cleansed by the word that I have spoken to you. Abide in me as I abide in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me. I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing.’”

5. Response

R. The Father is the farmer, the Son is the life and the Holy Spirit is the sap that gives life.

All We are the branches, grafted into the life of the Trinity

R. The Lord has sown his Word...

All Which fell in us as upon fertile soil!

R. The gardener has watered all with tenderness...

All So that we may be glorified with our fruits!

R. The branch that stays on the vine...

All Will have life through the sap of the Holy Spirit!

R. Glory to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit:

All Holy Trinity, make of us a new people!

6. Dehonian Psalm (in alternate voices)

Following the example of Jesus,
Shepherd of the simple and the little ones,
We want to proclaim the joy of the Gospel to the most needy.

To those who suffer, we want to offer solidarity;
To the homeless, a roof;
To the hungry, a table
We want to be friendly and always in solidarity
Just like Jesus of Nazareth

In this way the Church will be our home:
A house of brothers and sisters, not built on acronyms and meetings,
But on relations of justice, attention and welcoming of others.

Together, despite our limits,
We wish to share our gifts and talents,
Giving witness to your kingdom
With simple and every day gestures.

We are the living church,
With our voices and our hands,
Which proclaim here on earth the future that will come:
We believe and expect the new Heaven and the New Earth,
Where justice will dwell!

And so we shall be one family,
Without sorrow, division or discord.
God shall be our shepherd
And we shall be his faithful people.

7. Prayer

Look upon us here, Lord, who are like family before you:
We praise you for the gift of the Eucharist,
Bread that feeds us and which makes us become one family.
May we always live more in union and sharing,
As signs of the New Humanity which you came to inaugurate.
Amen.

8. Final Hymn

Literature

- John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Ut Unum Sint* (1995).

Meeting XV

THE DEHONIAN LAITY IN THE CHURCH

Objectives of the Meeting

- To show that Father Dehon with all that he was and did, desired to serve the Church, that he might be a sign of the Reign of the Heart of Jesus.
- To reflect on today’s Church and its mission in the world.
- To deepen in the followers of the dehonian charism the sense of communication and participation in the Church.

Outline of the Meeting: strategies and activities

Taking as a point of departure the Word of God and the writings of Father Dehon regarding the Church intending to show his relationship and his love for the Church, to which he had consecrated his entire life. We have previously seen the importance that he has given to the first sacrament of initiation in the Church, Baptism. Beginning with their Baptism and the Eucharist, the laity are, and are strengthened, as members of the Church and that membership they share and are strengthened in the Dehonian charism. As a support for the reflection, they will comprehend the “newspaper” of the Church in the time of Father Dehon and today

It is necessary that the animator of this meeting place special attention to the way the Church is in the local culture and would be able to adapt the presentation in the Church in all its realities.

Development of the Meeting

A. Welcome

After welcoming the participants, show some visible element that characterizes the local Church (the parish, Conference of bishops) and the universal church. It can be a statue of the patron saint, a newspaper or periodical on the pastoral plan of the parish or of the Diocese, a picture of the Pope surrounded by many people... or perhaps we can present a video or a power point about some recent happening in the Church. Invite the participants to make a brief prayer of silence for the Church in response to all that has been seen.

B. Reflection: *The Charism and Mission of the Lay Dehonian in the Church*

1. A Text from the Bible (Mt 20:1-8)

“For the kingdom of heaven is like a householder who went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard. And having agreed with the laborers for a denarius a day he sent them into his vineyard. And about the third hour he went out and saw others standing in the market place idle; and he said to them, Go you also into the vineyard and I will give you whatever is just. So they went. And again he went out about the sixth and about the ninth hour, and did as before. But about the eleventh hour he went out and found others standing about, and he said to them, Why do you stand here all day idle? They said to him, “Because no one has hired us.” He said to them “go you also into the vineyard. But when evening had come, the owner of the vineyard said to his steward, Call the laborers, and pay them their wages, beginning from the last even to the first.”

2. A Text from Fr. Dehon

“We should love the Church and obey it, as children. It is so loved by the Heart of Jesus. It is his spouse! His union is celebrated in the Song of Songs. St. John exalts the Church in the apocalypse: it was for it that the Lord offered His life. For it he instituted the Eucharist. Jesus lives in the Church. He left all of His authority to it and all his graces. We have been loved in its visible Head, in its ministers, in its liturgy, in its laws. We have been venerated in it as our Mother. The church is the spouse as the mystical body of Jesus Christ. The souls consecrated to the love of the Heart of Jesus are like wise to the Head of the Body (Jesus) as the organ of the Church to love and console Jesus. The reparative souls are as the mystical body of Jesus Christ, the organ of the Church immolate themselves for the glory of God and for the salvation of souls.

The Heart of Jesus is the sun which illumines us through the church, the same Church that Jesus gave birth to in the responses of his heart. And for us he purchased and found favor and grace in the blood of his heart. The Heart of Jesus seems in the womb of the Church as the star which gives light to all and gives life to every soul.” (MSC 212)

“It is necessary that the worship of the Heart of Jesus, begun in the mystical life of the souls, comes down and permeates the social life of the people. It will be the supreme remedy for the cruel evils of our moral world.” (ART-REV-1889-0200-8031001/2 [“Les opportunités du règne du Sacré Cœur”, in *RCJ* (Feb 1889)]).

3. Theme for Reflection

3.1. Father Dehon, man of the Church

And about the third hour he went out and saw others standing in the market place idle; and he said to them, Go you also into the vineyard and I will give you whatever is just. (Mt 20:3-4).

With this verse we are immersed into a spiritual dynamic through which the Lord calls each one of us to take an active role in his “vineyard”. The theme of our meeting is the experience of being in relationship to the church as is Father Dehon in what he has said and done.

Father Dehon lived as a man of the Church: his vocation, his prayer and his apostolic work with his personal gifts and initiatives, are marks of his strong feeling and belonging and participating in the Church. He did not see the Church as an organization, overseeing pastoral action and its ministers but rather as the Mystical Body of Christ – in its biblical vision and spiritual openness – that has as its center the Heart of Jesus, contemplated as the Heart of the same Church. In summary if the Church is the Body of Christ, as St Paul says (Rom 12; 1Cor 12), the Heart of Jesus is the center of the Church, and all of us, its members, are united to it by means of Baptism and the Holy Spirit as vines united to the trunk of the vine. (Jn 15:5). Father Dehon especially valued each aspect of the life of the Church, the centrality of the Eucharist, when it renews the life of the Church, the sanctification of the priests, the communion of the faithful, and the pastors, among them the Bishop and the Pope. The formation of the evangelizers in its era included lay women and men, missionary activity, spreading the Papal Encyclicals, above all its social content, attention to the poor and youth. It is enough to see this becoming real in the parish and in the Diocese during his first years of priesthood. In all this he sought after unity (that all may be one...*Sint Unum*) for which the reign of God may become present in the world, through the intercession and testimony of the Church (thy Kingdom Come...*Adveniat Regnum Tuum*).

3.2. In communion with the church

It is in the Heart of the Church that Father Dehon entered into communion with the Heart of Christ and with the Heart of humanity. This is easily demonstrated, for example, in his attention and fidelity to the Pope, in his pastoral care for souls at San Quentin in his preoccupation with the sanctification of the priests, in his constant attention to the bishops, in his missionary zeal and spreading the papal teaching. He says in his Diary: “the ideal of my life, what I hope for in my tears as a youth was to be a missionary and a martyr. It seems to me that these wishes have been realized. I am a missionary through the missionaries who have been sent throughout the world; and also a martyr through the events that our Lord permitted to happen to me when I could not take the vow of victim through the years 1878 to 1884.” (NQT 45/1 [1925]).

The request of Leo XIII that his Encyclicals be spread was taken seriously and profoundly marked his spiritual identity: “I wanted to contribute to the betterment of the people through the reign of justice and Christian charity. A great part of my life was consumed in doing this. Leo XIII was pleased to consider me one of the faithful interpreters of his Social Encyclicals. Likewise in this field, this effort should continue. The masses of the people are not convinced that the Church has the practical and authentic solutions for all the social problems”. (COR-LCC-1912-0314-8090139/48 [*Souvenirs*]). He suffered for the pastoral inadequacies of the Church in his time and he lived the crisis of the separation between the Church and the birth of modernism. All this was very stressful.

Already in his period of study in Paris, he discovered this orientation of communion with the Church. Similarly, in the following commentary we observe his participation in Lent at the Cathedral of Notre Dame. “It was a happy experience to be in relationship with the large Christian population. There exists a movement of faith and love of the Church which is communicated to the souls.” (NHV 1/69). This is going to transform them little by little into a mystical attitude of communion with the Church which will mark him all his life. “To pray in the name of the Church, to pray with Jesus for all the souls who desire it, is a truly blessed mission.” (NHV 5/131)

It certainly was his experience as a stenographer at Vatican I which definitively marked his feelings about the spirituality of the Church: “What a blessed day! Such an emotional spectacle! Around the Vicar of Jesus Christ, the Supreme lawmaker and Supreme Head of the Church, all the successors of the Apostles, all the Bishops of the Dioceses were united to give witness to the teaching of the Gospel. Being and speaking over the tomb of Peter, and around it and above the tomb, the Church comes in and prepares to listen to the Spirit and proclaim its teachings. What a magnificent witness of the unity of the Church and together with the laity a witness of the love and obedience which strengthens and carries on this unity.” (NHV 7/4).

3.3. The Church, the mystery which flows from the Heart of Jesus

But Father Dehon’s experience of Church does not reduce itself to an institutional aspect, albeit visible. His more profound communion is with the Church in its great mystery. With all the Christian tradition, he sees the Church as the spouse born of the Heart of Jesus pierced on the cross: “As Eve was brought from the side of Adam during his deep sleep, the Church, the spouse of the Savior, was generated in the Heart of Jesus during his mystical dream on the cross.” (CAM 2/211) He says it in this way: “The Heart of Jesus is the sun which illumines us through the church, the same Church that Jesus gave birth to in the responses of his heart. And for us he purchased and

found favor and grace in the blood of his heart. The Heart of Jesus seems in the womb of the Church as the star which gives light to all and gives life to every soul.” (MSC 212)

The experience to be the Church for Father Dehon embraces his entire person and is the fundamental dimension of his spiritual life. He always felt at one with the Church and all of his activity he accomplished as the Church. If rather some specific notions which characterize concrete aspects of the Church of his time were overcome – after all between Vatican I and Vatican II almost one hundred years passed by – others, on the other hand, passed the barrier of time and continue to challenge and stimulate us.

Contemplating the wounded Heart, Father Dehon sees there the birth of the Church, from which flows “blood and water” coming from the open side of the Crucified (Jn 19:30-34).

The blood recalls the sacrifice of the martyrs, the offering of the Eucharist, Jesus’ oblation, the Heart of the covenant; the water recalls the gift of the Holy Spirit (living water) and the Baptism, the sacrament of our regeneration. In the same way, the Church is born from the pierced Heart of Jesus filled with the Holy Spirit, embodied by baptism and the Eucharist to make us new people of God, the people of the new covenant (cf. CAM 2/220-213).

The Church is born from the Heart of Christ and seeks to spread his Kingdom in souls and in society, fighting for the values of life, dignity, goodness, truth, justice, love and peace. The Church has its foundation in Christ, in his heart. Father Dehon takes this as his own source and foundation, praying and working tirelessly for a faithful Church of the Gospel of Christ’s Heart. He was not alone in having this vision of the Church, but he was the protagonist in the middle of pragmatism and the utilitarian mentality of his time, driven mainly by economic factors; but he was convinced that only the Heart of Jesus could respond to the deepest needs of the human heart.

3.4. The Church, mystery of communion in the Mystical Body of Christ

By the Holy Spirit, the bond of communion, we are in Jesus “one body” (Eph 4:4). Baptism unites us to one another as members, giving us solidarity in the same faith, hope and charity, sharing the same mission of evangelization. The Eucharist reinforces this communion, uniting us closely to the Body of Christ, present in the Sacrament and disseminated throughout the Church: Because the loaf of bread is one, we, though many, are one body, for we all partake of the one loaf.” (1Cor 10:17). In this regard, Fr. Dehon teaches that the Baptism and the Eucharist are sacraments of unity, communion, participation, doing in us what Christ himself prayed, “Father, that they may be one, so that the world may believe” (Jn 17:21-23).

This communion through Baptism and the Eucharist connect us to each other, not only spiritually, but also as living symbols of the presence of the Risen. As the Holy Spirit makes of water, bread and wine sacraments of the presence of Jesus, that same Spirit makes us also living symbols of the Lord to the world. It is a sacramental and missionary communion, spiritual and effective, which has made us living members of the Body of Christ, as missionaries and evangelists witnesses.

3.5. The Church – The People of God

The definition of the Church as communion and people of God is a concept that did not exist at the time of Father Dehon, at least not with the clarity achieved by Vatican II. The Church is the communion with the Father through Christ in the Holy Spirit. Therefore, it is a communion that takes place in the Word of God and the sacraments, especially in Baptism and the Eucharist; and the relationship between the unity and plurality of the Church is born from the communion; the Church

is communion, starting from the notions of mystery, the sacrament, the body of Christ, God's people. All of these notions were rediscovered by the recent Council. This communion as the universal Church is realized fully in each of the local churches. While it is true that Father Dehon had not used the word communion, he used other expressions where this meaning was already present. One of these is the expression *Sint Unum*.

The *Sint Unum* is also now a very important and motivational word, reassessed by Vatican II Council to promote the unity within the Church and the communion among other Christian Churches and inter-religious dialogues. Under this heading, Pope John Paul II issued an extensive encyclical⁶; several prayer meetings were held in Assisi, in the shadow of St. Francis. There all sorts of meetings were held from Pope Paul VI to Pope Francis, with leaders of other Churches and religions. Most recently a similar meeting was held in Turkey between Pope Francis and Bartholomew I, Ecumenical Patriarch of the Orthodox Church. During this meeting a joint statement was signed, committing the two churches to intensify efforts to promote the full unity of all Christians: "To this end, we offer the assurance of our fervent prayer as Pastors of the Church, asking our faithful to join us in praying "that all may be one, that the world may believe" (Jn 17:21)"⁷.

3.6. *The Church that we want*

The notion of God's people was already present in the embryonic form, of Father Dehon's speeches when he insisted on the need to leave the sacristy! You need to go to the people! This conviction expresses an idea of Church being open to the world, open to the hopes and the sufferings of men and women, giving reasons for hope.

Therefore, it is not a Church closed in on itself and its interests, self-referential as Pope Francis says, but a Church always attentive to the concerns and problems of all:

- A missionary Church, involved in social problems, concerned with the formation of each, where the distance between the clergy and the people is minimized
- A Church that serves because it aims to build the Kingdom of the Heart of Christ
- A Church in fraternal communion, which is Wife, Body of Christ, and a people of believers
- A Church that is in a constant process of formation and renewal
- A Church that welcomes and is attentive to integrate the differences such as richness rather than division
- A Church awakening the human and Christian vocation of the laity and attentive to the priestly and religious vocations
- A Church constantly being built and converted to be more holy, and close to its people
- A Church in dialogue, open to the poor, the favorites of the Heart of Christ

Father Dehon would have been delighted today with Pope Francis' *Evangelii Gaudium*, and would have enthusiastically embraced the content of this encyclical as he did in his time with the *Rerum Novarum* of Leo XIII.

And that would have been for him what he would seek to pass on to his followers, lay and religious Dehonians today. In fact, when Pope Francis, received Father José Ornelas Carvalho, Superior General of the SCJ Congregation, in an audience in September of 2014, he asked for the

⁶ John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Ut Unum Sint*, on the commitment to Ecumenism (May 25, 1995).

⁷ *Joint Declaration of Pope Francis and Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew* (November 30, 2014).

dissemination of his encyclical to show people how the Church should be. We can assume this papal request as a task for the entire Dehonian Family.

3.7. Being the Church of today by following the example of Father Dehon

Father Dehon lived, studied and worked always in communion with the Church. In his time as a missionary, communicator and speaker, he insisted on the loyalty of the Church to the Gospel, the Eucharist as sacrament link of unity and love; and on the testimony of the Beatitudes as a principle of social apostolate.

Since the beginning of his activity in San Quentin, our Founder appreciated the participation of the laity as collaborators in evangelization, from their social environment. An example of this is the Association of Reparation - "*Adveniat regnum tuum*" – composed of lay people involved with spirituality and the social apostolate. Since then, Father Dehon foreshadowed a missionary Church, a church in solidarity, servant church, as a Mother hugging everyone, starting with the most poor and simple.

In this sense, Father Dehon occupied himself with the training of missionaries and apostolic renewal in the light of changing times and challenges. Thus, he was preparing - in his heart and in his works - to what today is called the "new evangelization". For this reason, since its inception, religious and lay people will help to spread the same charism and mission, in various pastoral programs. Following Father Dehon's footsteps we are called to be a Church and, within the church, to be missionary disciples of Jesus Christ.

3.8. Contribute to the Dehonian charism

As a starting point, being dehonian means nourishing the faith with the spirituality of the Heart of Jesus, according to the experience of faith of Fr. Dehon, based on self-giving and restorative love of God's Son. In Father Dehon we can find the Heart of Jesus in the Gospel, in the narratives of his relationship with the Father, and in his Spirit of unity, in his relationship with the holy and sinful people from all social and cultural classes; but in a special way in his relationship with his disciples, the poor, the sinners, the sick, the women and children, the rich, the religious and political authorities and in his opponents.

Powered by this experience, we participate in the mission entrusted to his disciples: "Go therefore, and make disciples of all nations (Mt 28:19). "Go to the people" and "leave the sacristy" these are calls to achieve this objective: to make disciples of Jesus, to make them members of the Church, his people, and his family.

Pope Francis uses similar words, drawing attention especially to "get out of one's self" rather than out of some territorial geographical location: go to another, approach them, in Jesus' name.

This can be achieved by everyone, even to those who have family and work commitments in a particular place. These are most certainly, the first places to go to proclaim the love of God by personal example and – as St. Francis said – if necessary, use words.

Being dehonian means being witness to the love of God in all areas of our life:

- a) *In the family*: The Dehonian layperson attempts to make of his own family a domestic church (LG 11). The required elements are: living love, the sharing of goods, prayer and listening to the Word of God in common (Ac 2:42).

- b) *In the ecclesial communion*: “The ecclesial communion, while retaining its universal dimension, finds its necessary expression in a visible immediate parish. It is there that the Church is seen locally. In certain sense, *it is the Church living in the midst of the homes of her sons and daughters*”⁸. Furthermore, the parish is increasingly becoming a community of communities, in other words, made of small communities. This means that the parish is suited for lay dehonians to find numerous opportunities to participate in catechesis, liturgy, social service coordination and administration.
- c) *In the workplace*, where most people spend and live the best part of the day: Develop and disseminate a spirituality of work, deal well with peers, consider it as participation in God’s creative work, promote the dignity of workers and improve the working conditions. Treat well co-workers, dependents, subordinates, entrepreneurs; be interested in those who cannot find a job and in the families of migrants and those who are exploited without a living wage.
- d) *In society*: When Father Dehon insisted on the “Kingdom of the Sacred Heart in Souls and in Society” (INE-ARP-1889-0208-0086404-9030002 [“Association réparatrice du Sacré Cœur de Jésus” (Feb 8, 1889)]; cf. ASC 1/118 [Jan 13]), he thought of the participation of Christians in associations of workers and entrepreneurs, in the neighborhood associations where they live, in associations for the promotion of culture, education, sports and in the same way political participation. He himself had experience of political and administrative involvement with his family: his grandfather, father and his brother Henry had been mayors of La Capelle for long periods of time. He frequently expressed his political opinion, wanting to collaborate with France, in solidarity with people and in Christian way. If at first he was more favorable to the monarchy, later he understood democracy, whose values he promoted. The Dehonian laity is called to study the Social Doctrine of the Church, to understand how to make society closer to a human community, just, fraternal solidary, according to Gospel values; under these values get involved in initiatives for the poor, respect for human dignity, integrity of creation, with a view to a better world for future generations.
- e) *In the field of the Dehonian Family*, a large field is open for the dehonian lay persons to collaborate in communion with priests and religious dehonians, with the consecrated persons and structures, promoting the Dehonian charism among different set of relationships, forming new groups of laity and young adults participating in dehonian initiatives, as dehonian youth missions and vocations, witnessing and promoting the dehonian spirituality: fidelity to the Eucharist and Eucharistic adoration. Listening to the Word, the spirit of reparative oblation and communion which makes us new men and women, with the power of the Holy Spirit and in the likeness of the heart of Jesus.

C. Dehonian Testimony

I was born in a rural area and lived there until age 11. I learned my first catechism lesson from my mother who was semi-illiterate, but God-fearing

I had to walk quite a bit from my house to the city to participate in religious festivals and my father and I participated in all the ones that were considered important, such as Easter.

⁸ John Paul II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles Laici* (Dec 30, 1988), n. 26.

At age 11 we moved to another city. My parents wanted me to study and to begin to attend Church more frequently.

After two years later, one day my life changed 180 degrees: a decision could change my life. And this is what happened.

Invited by a Dehonian priest to enter the seminary, there was not even a moment of hesitation or doubt in making the decision of my life. I said yes and entered the dehonian minor seminary with just two years of basic studies. I received a solid Christian formation and I learned the basic ethical and moral principles with the dehonian fathers, a sure reflection and teachings of the founder, Father Leon Dehon.

All my activities as a seminarian were the result of Father Dehon's teachings. I will come to know children through catechesis, youth through retreats and scouting, adults through a theater, just like Father Dehon wanted. My activities except for my studies and prayers were directed strongly in this direction: the other. And my love for Jesus continued to grow and intensifying until I reached the third year of theology.

At the seminary I received the foundations of a living faith in the love of God through Jesus Christ, my Lord and Savior. There I learned what the freely given love of God means and that this love should be confirmed and to experience it in human relations. In the daily liturgical celebrations, and during my weekly vigil hours before the Blessed Sacrament, I learned how to pray and to ask for reparation to the Heart of Jesus for my many sins and those of my brothers.

With this total dedication of time to prayer, study, rest and apostolic activities, I believed in the love of God and neighbor. It had all the paperwork to become dehonian priest. But it did not happen. In an instant, my life changed again: I left the seminary!

God was not calling me to be a priest. Why? Because I was, and still am, disobedient and stubborn. Rebellion and disobedience are features that I still carry with me.... I understood that was not my calling. He was not able to live one vow that was required: obedience. My stubbornness and rebelliousness were not consistent with that commitment. God did not allow me to remain in the seminary and to become introverted and frustrated priest. It was true, that was not my calling.

So I left the seminary, but all Christian, moral, ethical and human formation achieved in the seminar made me a practicing Christian who still is struggling to be a faithful follower of Jesus. I like to say that I am ex-seminarian and a dehonian. With these solid foundations, obtained by being connected to the dehonian fathers, I continued with my journey of discovery.

I became a teacher and worked as a teacher for 35 years. However, I thought of myself as an educator more than a teacher. I did not miss any opportunity to talk about God and Jesus Christ. I taught philosophy and this helped me a lot in the compromise concerning of evangelization. I was, above all, a Christian teacher, thanks to the training received in the seminary. I was not able to be a priest but I became a father. I started a family. By God's grace, I found a wonderful woman and next to her I transmitted the Christian foundations that I received in the seminary to our four children. Today all of them are the best children, God-fearing and active in the Church.

I continued my service of evangelization. Together with my wife I became an evangelist. I have worked extensively with youth. Together with other young people and deeply rooted in the dehonian spirituality, I participated in founding of the youth movement called Shalom which expands throughout the diocese of Light. It was a job that lasted 15 years. The more I gave the more blessings I received from God.

The pastors of my church gave me every chance to exercise my lay apostolate. I was an extraordinary minister of the Holy Communion for many years; I was a witness in the premarital preparation courses of couples, and a qualified witness for Marriage. I am very grateful to God for all these opportunities that were granted by the Dehonian Fathers. I have received the double of blessings from God through all the work of evangelization accomplished. Therefore I have developed multiple roles in the Church according to God's will.

In my local parish of St. Vincent Ferrer I have always benefited from the dehonian spirituality. I am very privileged. I was baptized, I received my First Communion, I received confirmation, I got married, I baptized my four children and now my three grandchildren. All these, combined with a solid Christian education, are valid for a lifetime thanks to the generosity of the Priests of Sacred Heart of Jesus!

There is only thing left to do: to say "thank you very much" to the Dehonian Fathers who have done so much so I could get to know God and lead me to love him in turn by loving my fellow brothers.

(José Carlos Veloso, Formiga-MG, Brazil)

D. Discussion Points

At this time, we wish to share with simplicity, between brothers and sisters, our experience of the Church, of our place of residence, activities and the participation we have in our communities, its services and projects. In the sharing allow yourselves to be led by the following question:

1. *In following the Dehonian spirituality, in what way will it help me to be Church and to contribute to the growth of my Church?*

In silence, listen to a short text of the Word of God as an illumination for our shared witness and dialogue.

Note: *The facilitator ought to choose one of the proposed texts allowing him/herself to be guided by the ecclesial context of the participants.*

- A. We are disciples united with Jesus, proclaiming God's Kingdom (Mt 9,35; 10,7);
- B. We are living members of the Body of Christ, through the Holy Spirit (Eph 4.1-7);
- C. We are servants of the Gospel with gifts and various ministries (Rom 12.3-8).

E. A Moment of Time

1. Hymn *(one's choice, related to the topic of Adveniat Regnum Tuum)*

2. Word of God (Lk 22:24-30)

Proclamation of the Gospel according to Luke

At that time, an argument broke out among them about which of them should be regarded as the greatest. He said to them, "The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them and those in authority over them are addressed as 'Benefactors'; but among you it shall not be so. Rather, let the greatest among you be as the youngest, and the leader as the servant. For who is greater: the one seated at table or the one who serves? Is it not the one seated at table? I am among you as the one who

serves. It is you who have stood by me in my trials; and I confer a kingdom on you, just as my Father has conferred one on me, that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom; and you will sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel.

(A moment of silence to meditate on the Gospel of the Lord)

3. Shared Meditation

P: The example of Father Dehon encourages us to be witness of the Gospel in fraternal community of the Church with dedication, reliability and service:

All: Who wants to be first must be the servant of all! (cf. Lk 22:26-27)

R1 Father Dehon offers the Heart of Jesus as a path for people, as the path of the Church and as a way for society:

All: The Heart of Jesus is the heart of the Church, a star that illuminates, animates and enlivens everything (MSC 212).

R2 The Church is our home and our family. In it we are born through baptism, in it we mature as disciples, in it we hear the Word of the Gospel, in it we draw from the Eucharist, in it we are strengthened in faith, hope and charity:

All: Blessed are those who hear the Word of God and put it into practice! (cf. Lk 1:28)

R3 Living in community is to live as Jesus lived: in the dialogue, availability, forgiveness, becoming a gift to each other, in oblation:

All: If you love one another, everyone will know that you are my disciples (cf. Jn 13:35).

4. Act of Oblation

P: Filled with the Holy Spirit, by which makes us God's family in the Church, we pray together:

All: We bless you Holy Father, for giving us your Son. He has loved us to the end and gave his life for us so we should all meet again as a family. Hear our praises raised to you today: "that they may all be one, as you, Father, are in me and I in you, that they also may be in us, that the world may believe" (Jn 17:21). Accept the sacrifice of our fraternal life, the joys and sufferings, the desire to live reconciled. Encourage with your Spirit our communities to remain in your love and receive the fullness of your joy. Amen.

Our Father...

5. Invocation of Blessing

P: Oh Lord, look at us, illuminate our steps and confirm us in hope:

All: We are your people, the flock that is guided by your hand (cf. Ps 99:3)

P: May the Lord confirm us in his service as his disciples and his children

All: Behold thy servants, let it be to us according to thy word! (cf. Lk 1:38)

All: May He bless us now and forever, In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

All: Amen.

(At this point participants can greet or give the Sign of Peace, while a hymn is sung.)

1. A pastoral plan of the local Church (diocese or parish).
2. Vatican II Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, Chapter IV.
3. Pope John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles Laici* (1988).

Meeting XVI

THE LAY DEHONIAN, A DISCIPLE OF THE MASTER, JESUS

Objectives of the Meeting

- Understand that in the mission of Jesus, we find the fundamental experience of God in the depth of his prayer and of his permanent awareness of “doing the will of the Father.”
- Learn that Jesus did not reveal himself as Teacher all of a sudden, but that in the silence of Nazareth, in communion with the Father and in the working of the Holy Spirit, he prepared himself until he was an adult, living with Joseph and Mary, attending the synagogue, and listening to the Word.
- Show that the lay dehonian is called to be a disciple of Jesus after the example of Father Dehon, participating with the Teacher, learning from him and assuming his lifestyle, his personal destiny and his mission in the world. The disciple discovers himself as a missionary.

Outline of the Meeting: strategies and activities

- After reflecting on the essential elements of the dehonian charism and on the participation in the Church, present the relation of Jesus with his disciples, from the gospel and the methodology of the formation of the disciple.
- Suggest questions for reflection in groups, more to give personal witness than an intellectual reflection. This will enrich more a personal relationship with the dehonian charism and discipleship, learning from one another.
- End with a prayer that will help us contemplate, like Father Dehon, the relationship of each one with Jesus and his mission.

Development of the Meeting

A. Welcome

After the greeting, suggest:

That the participants give a brief sharing about the people from whom they have learned something in their lives: parents, professionals, popular persons, religious leaders... What have we learned from Jesus?

B. Reflection: *Lay Dehonian, Disciple of the Master Jesus*

1. A Text from Bible (Mt 11:28-30)

Jesus said: “Come to me all who are weary and find life burdensome and I will refresh you. Take my yoke upon your shoulders and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble of heart. Your souls will find rest, for my yoke is easy and my burden light.”

2. A Text from Fr. Dehon

“Jesus came to carry out the great work of reconciliation; but why his hidden life for thirty years, unknown, apparently inactive and useless? It was to wait in all this time for the hour when God would call him. The redeemer had been promised for all humanity, announced by the prophets and

foretold in the signs to come. Nevertheless, few people knew the time of his arrival and the mystery of the incarnation. On his birth, wonders/marvels of nature are recorded, that celebrated the arrival of their king. The Magi from the East recognized the mysterious star that announces the coming of the Savior King, sought by all the peoples. But very soon everything goes back to silence. Everything was once again buried in obscurity.

Those who truly believe, those who follow the attractions of grace, the voice of the angels and inspiration of the Holy Spirit, kept these mysteries in their hearts and worshiped in silence. They remained submissive to the decrees of wisdom, love and mercy of God. Some of these privileged souls did not live to see the day of the redeeming sacrifice, and waited in the other world the hour of his happy redemption. Joseph, Mary and Jesus, the Savior of the world, lived many years in great obscurity, solitude, work, poverty and in anonymity.

Who can know the depths of the paths of wisdom, love and generosity of God? Who can imagine and relate to the acts of virtue of these years of obscurity darkness? And, why all of this? Why that long and painful journey of escape to a strange, pagan and idolatrous country? Well, because Jesus was a victim, a liberator and redeemer, and because this was in God's plan/destiny, for reasons that exceed our capacity to understand.

The angel tells Joseph: "Get up, take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you to leave. Herod will be looking for the child in order to kill him." (Mt 2:13). How much faith, how much obedience and abandonment of these two saintly persons that, like docile instruments, place themselves in the hands of Providence and abandon themselves to the will of God! The omnipotence of God seems to move away from the Savior, but it is to fulfill the decrees of his wisdom and his infinite love. The seed of Christianity should be spread in Egypt for the future, through the merits of our Lord, of Mary and Joseph.

The Lord had said: "Here I am, O God, to do your will." (Heb 10:7). That is why to fulfill the divine will, the Son of God submits to everything. And despite his own desires, ardent zeal and love, he awaits always the hour destined for the different phases of redemption and accomplishes everything at the appropriate time and place" (DSP 49-52).

3. Theme for Reflection

3.1. Learn from the Teacher

"In the past, God spoke to our ancestors many times and in many ways through the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us through his Son." (Heb 1:1-2)

With this thought, the same Word of God tells us that God reveals himself not only rarely and even less in an extraordinary way, in order not to reduce the number of his interlocutors.

In our meeting we want to ponder this truth: The Word – that becomes evident in an audible and visible form – by becoming flesh became silent. This was not an empty silence, as if it was lacking content, but rather it was a pedagogy of learning in view of an eloquence that does not have roots in the richness of the vocabulary or in unpublished expressions about God, but, above all, it buds forth from life. The discussion of Jesus, when he begins his public life, is the mature fruit of His silent experience in Nazareth, of the deep contemplation of the daily life, of the deep observation of the most habitual and ordinary events of His family life, among His contemporaries and his fellow countrymen.

We want to learn from Jesus our teacher, his way of learning, placing ourselves at his feet as attentive disciples, so that helped by him, we experience growth. “Jesus, as Luke tells us, grew both in wisdom and grace, gaining favor with God and people”. (cf. Lk 2:52). The experience is gradual and progressive “and so we shall all come together to the oneness in our faith and in our knowledge of the Son of God; we shall become mature people, reaching to the very height of Christ’s full stature” (Eph 4:13). Father Dehon grew in his pursuit of perfection experiencing a greater knowledge of the love of his Heart from the contemplation of His pierced side. But even before this, he had other learning experiences that became his greatest motive in his life from which he never wanted to stray. But he tried to deepen his relationship with Jesus through the intimate union with the Sacred Heart of Jesus, his Shepherd and Teacher.

We want to become missionaries of Christ, on our journey of faith and the apostolate of Father Dehon.

- Even though it is not totally new – because even the Pharisees and teachers of the law had disciples (cf. Mt 23:15; Mc 2:18), who taught the Law of Moses and its correct interpretation – discipleship, as followers of Jesus our Teacher, has its own unusual characteristics. Above all we refer to the relationship that is established between the teacher and the disciple. One of these characteristics is precisely the ultimate situation of being with Jesus, which is not one of learning the Law, but to become his collaborator and to participate in His mission.
- According to the Gospel of Mark, being incorporated into the discipleship of Jesus suggests going through three important phases: the experience of the calling (vocation – “Then Jesus went up the hill and called to himself the men he wanted. They came to him.” – Mk 3:13), the apprenticeship (formation – “And He chose twelve, whom he named apostles, to be with him.” – Mk 3:14), and the testimony (mission – “And sent them out to preach.” – Mk 3:14).
 - The dynamic of the discipleship starts with an **encounter** with Jesus-Teacher, that demands that we be available to undertake a journey of **understanding** the mystery of Jesus-Messiah, which will promote the **communion** with Jesus-Son of God and finally will lead to **testimony** of Jesus-Savior (cf. *The Aparecida Document*, n. 249).
 - In his personal experience Father Dehon, as confirmed by several of his reflections on the Gospel, witnessed by many of his Gospel reflections, proposes to start from the Hear itself o Jesus, that to be a disciple of Christ means to follow his steps, to enter into the school of the heart of Jesus and learning from him (cf. Mt 11:29).
 - In this manner, it is impossible to drink the dehonian spirituality without being a disciple of Jesus. This requires not a generic approach, but a clear methodology, coherent with the Gospel.
 - Therefore, a process of reflection which we now propose with some questions is necessary.

3.2. *Jesus: one more teacher?*

There are many passages of the Gospel where Jesus is called teacher. It is almost a common manner of addressing him, not just by the disciples (cf. Mk 9:5), but also by the persons who are outside his close circle or those that met with him by accident (cf. Mt 9:16; Lk 12:13).

Even his opponents call him teacher (cf. Mk 12:14; Lk 11:45). We can say that Jesus is one teacher among others. However, identifying him as teacher, even though he had not received a formal education and recognized as such, people understood that he was different from others. (cf. Mt 7:29; Lk 4:32). This difference gave him authority to teach. In reality, what was this convincing and attractive authority?

3.3. *Jesus, a teachers like the others or different?*

From the gospel traditions, we detect clearly the points which show that Jesus was not just another teacher, but the teacher par excellence, even though we see that he shared some traits with other teachers, that is, he used certain teaching methods which he did not invent (parables, proverbs, symbolic gestures, etc.) But there are a number of substantial differences between Jesus and his “colleagues”:

- **Formation**: although teachers were formed in official schools (cf. Ac 22:3); Jesus developed during the 30 years before his ministry; his life was his school.
- The manner of calling his **disciples**: although teachers tended to be preoccupied by eventual disciples, Jesus took the initiative to call and choose his disciples (cf. Jn 15:16) and the ones that he wanted (Mk 13:3) in total freedom of not accepting some (Mk 5:19).
- He accepts the **risk** of receiving persons that were not his true disciples (Mk 3:19; Jn 6:66; 13:21).
- The **authority** of his teaching was characteristic of Jesus the Teacher (Lk 4:32). His authority came from his experience of God, his communion with the Father and his love for his brothers. He taught what he lived.
- The discipleship as a **permanent** condition: Jesus did not prepare his disciples to convert them into teachers (Mt 13:8), because He is the only teacher, and the disciples had to have an attitude of continued learning.
- **Service** as a distinctive sign of the discipleship (Mk 10:45): this differentiated him from the other teachers who constantly prestige and privileges (Jn 13:12-15).

3.4. *What is the method and the content of Jesus' teaching?*

We can say that Jesus teaches with words (parables, sayings, etc.), but also with actions (miracles, signs, symbolic gestures, etc.). We frequently find in the gospel narrations the expression: “Jesus entered the synagogues and began teaching” (Mt 4:23; Mk 1:21; 6:2) without us giving us any indication of what he taught; on the contrary what we are given are his actions on behalf of the sick, the possessed and the sinners. (cf. Mt 9:35; Lk 13:10).

The characteristic of the itinerant mission of Jesus is the richness and diversity of his teaching methods. The variety of examples taken from daily life corroborates this (Mk 6:6; Mt 11:1; Lk 13:22). For this reason we can call them situational teaching, that is, a teaching that starts with concrete situations of life (Mk 3:31-35; 10,13-16). Jesus' teachings are characterized by its simple, clear and forceful language, that starts with life experience. A language rich in images and of forceful representations. It is inspired in many sources (business, fishing, agriculture, law, nature, feasts, family relations, etc.). In summary, the attitudes of Jesus teaches us more than any words. In fact, these do not only transmit ideas about important themes, but are expressions of himself. Therefore, the teaching of Jesus is presented not only as pure activity, but as a true and coherent style of life.

3.5. *What does it mean to be a disciple according to Jesus?*

Generally, we take the word “disciple” to be synonymous to “one who learns” or simply to “students”. In this manner, the way of learning is not clear. For Jesus the definition of disciple is not simply indicating passively someone who receives content. From the outset when he called his

disciples, to be a disciple implied a specific method of teaching. What one learned and what one learned was one. For Jesus there is only one form of learning: by practicing (cf. Jn 13:14-15).

It is curious to see how often we think that being a disciple is (simply) to follow Jesus. But when we read the gospels, we learn that the word “follow” does not always indicate to be a disciple. Many follow Jesus, especially in the first phase of his ministry in Galilee, when many miracles happened, and when he is always being followed by the crowds (cf. Mk 5:24; Jn 6:2). However, there is something unusually different from other teachers: Jesus takes the initiative to call, to separate from the crowd those whom he wants. We feel that this is an important point to understand about discipleship. It is not enough to follow a crowd, to let ourselves be led toward vagueness. Becoming a disciple is not an act that begins with us, but it is an initiative of God who draws us. It is an answer to a call. A calling that leads to a continuous life together. In fact, the disciples not only had to learn some teachings, but above all they had to become witnesses of the actions which the kingdom of God proclaimed by Jesus is made present. The calling of Jesus involves an intense bond with Him. In fact, it was an invitation to follow and stay with Him (Mk 1:18; 10:28).

3.6. What is the first duty/obligation of the disciple?

See *and listen*. In this first level of following, that is characterized by an intense and continual relationship with Jesus, we are able to distinguish three aspects that help to define this relation:

- The disciple is **witness** of the signs of Jesus and how He relates with whoever becomes close to Him. This does not take on a neutral, passive or indifferent form. It means joining Jesus as a model and guide for one’s personal way of being and acting (Mk 9:28-29).
- The disciple **listens** to the teaching of Jesus: he feels that His message is meant for him and he allows himself to be instructed and does get lost in the crowd. (Mk 4:10-12; 9:33-37; 10:10-11).
- The disciple is **initiated** by Jesus in the experience of God. Jesus does not talk to the disciples only about prayer or teach them how to pray, but he introduces them into the experience of meeting God (Mk 9:1-8).

3.7. What is the condition-requirement for being a disciple?

Those who set out to follow Jesus need to share his style of life. In fact, it is an existential attitude, which requires a mutual understanding, a capacity of sharing a life style. Therefore, there is only one way: live as He has lived.

In the Gospel, in the call narrations we learn that one of the requirements for being called was to break off from one’s family, because to be a disciples meant to belong to a basic group, which was the most important reference point of society at that time. Thus, the called ones were invited to leave this point of reference and replace it with another: the group of disciples, the new family of Jesus, as he says (cf. Mt 3:31-35; 19:28-30). This is the life style of the Master: it becomes the point of reference. It is what Pope Francis calls “departure”: to leave from oneself so as to encounter one’s brothers and sisters, to leave one’s world to open up to others.

We can give some characteristics of this style of life that we find in the gospels:

- Conflict with one’s own family (Mk. 3:20-21, 31-35).
- Coexistence with sinners and publicans (Mk 2:15-17).
- A relativization of rules and customs (Mk. 1:18-20, 23-28; 7,1-15).

3.8. What is the consequence of being a disciple of Jesus?

From the first moment that Jesus called to become his disciples, the purpose of this calling is evident: share with the disciples, alongside a style of life, also a mission (Mk 1:17). The time lived in sharing his style of life, in reality, was a phase of the preparation for the mission, to announce the Kingdom and making it present. That is why we cannot think of the discipleship without a mission; in fact, this is one of the essential characteristics.

To better understand the content of the mission of Jesus and that of his disciples, it is necessary to re-visit the themes referring to the mission, found in the gospels. For example, the language used to refer to the mission of the ones called: fishermen (Mt 9:36), day laborers (Mt 9:38) or shepherds.

All of this indicated the newness of the Jesus movement and, without a doubt, its originality. Also the images that describe the mission of the disciples: the harvest (Mt 9:36ff; 13:24-30), fishing (Mt 1:17), possessed intense connotations that evoked an urgent mission, pointed to a definitive intervention of God in history.

In conclusion, one can affirm that the mission of Jesus, confided to the disciples, was to make known the message of the imminent Kingdom of God. It was done not only through some verbal, theoretical announcement, but by demonstrating its presence: hence, the exorcisms, healings, etc. (Mk 6:7-13; Lk 10:4-12).

3.9. What is the consequence of taking on the mission of the disciple of Jesus?

The bond of the disciples with Jesus is finally to be found in the invitation to share his own destiny. It is easy to understand this consequence, because it is coherent: live as Jesus lived and announce that which he announced leads naturally to share his rejection and opposition that he provoked and faced. The gospel presents clearly the growing movement of opposition towards Jesus' mission: from the controversies and confrontations with the Pharisees, teachers of the law, who criticized his way of acting, to the more radical expression in Jerusalem with the central power who would decree his death.

In that moment, the opposition became radicalized: the chief priests accused him of not respecting the temple (Mk 11:17-33). The opposition and the fear that he caused led him to a death which in some way he could have foreseen for himself and in some way for his disciples.

3.10. Is it possible to be a lay dehonian without being a disciple of Jesus?

We cannot pretend to live a Christian spirituality if this does not pass through the discipleship. It is not possible to be Christian without following Christ. The dehonian spirituality essentially does not differ from the spirituality of the following of Christ, but it assumes the characteristics of a style that translates being Christian.

For Father Dehon, the contemplation of the open heart of our Savior is the condition necessary to know, love and follow him. Only the one who has an experience of being loved is directed to the practice of love. "He loved me" (Gal 2:20). And; therefore, to correspond to this love demands to love as he loved.

Love is the mission and aim of all Christian life. But to drink of the Dehonian charismatic fountain permits us to identify a methodology that helps to meet this goal. For Father Dehon, the great challenge is to contemplate the love of Christ in the mysteries of his life and the life of people. It is, above all, in the gospel where we find the great school for learning the path of the discipleship. The greatest lesson is given to us in the Eucharist, that is the "source and summit" of Christian life, and

that should be permanent. This is a fundamental element that energizes all of the followers of Christ.

3.11. How to enter into the school of the Teacher?

In light of the experience of the faith of Father Dehon, the source of inspiration for all dehonians, we find some clues that help us pedagogically in the commitment of the disciple.

- **Permanent formation:** in the conditions of his time, Father Dehon was in constant formation, he did not tire looking for knowledge, and assimilate and refine what he learned. Above all, he desired to grow in the knowledge of the gospel and the person of Christ; he was never satisfied with all that he achieved.
- **Learn to think:** it is not enough to assimilate contents, important and useful as they are. It is also necessary to look for the reasons, the fundamentals. It demands openness and dialog with oneself and with the world around us.
- **Commitment in the establishment of the Kingdom:** it is not enough to state the reality in its multiple aspects (socioeconomic-political) nor criticize only the system, but it is necessary to assume a style of life (evangelical) that contributes to the transformation of the society, by overcoming first of all the mediocrity of ideas and of the attitudes, and by contributing to the establishment of the Kingdom.

For Father Dehon, sin is much more than attitudes and concrete acts that make evil present; it is above all the rejection of the love of Christ. Rejection implies a decision before what is offered. The lay dehonian, as a disciple, realizes his vocation-mission to the extent in which he accepts this love and becomes a witness of it.

This demands entering into the school of the teacher:

- The fundamental attitude is **attentive listening** (Mt 7:24-27) that, to a certain extent, is already compromised. As opposed to a passive listening, which is simply informative, the disciple becomes a hearer in the most original sense of the word; s/he assumes the attitude of obedience, that requires self-discipline, and a generous effort of active listening.
- The listening in the school of the teacher takes us to **conversion** (Mk 9:33-35). Do not substitute the voice of the teacher, who shows us the path with our own voice, that often wants to soften the consequences of the decision to follow Christ.
- The love of Father Dehon is evident through the Church. He felt he was a living member of this body; therefore, he did not think it possible to follow Christ outside the ecclesiastical community, since it is there that one can meet Christ: in the Word, in the Eucharist, in the poor. The lay dehonian needs to grow in this awareness of not forming part of a spiritual ghetto, but of one body, one community formed by the disciples of the only Teacher, of one God and brothers of one family.

In reality, it is in the community of the disciples where the Lord makes himself present (Mt 18:20). It is a place par excellence to express the power of his resurrection (Lk 24:33). In the Church, the disciple is nourished through the Word of the Eucharist. In the community, the disciple cultivates a profound friendship with the Lord; he calls upon him to know and to do the will of the Father. As lay dehonians we form a parochial community, and in it, of the Dehonians. The group forms part of the Dehonian Family, where we learn to follow the Teacher through the experience of Father Dehon and his followers. We learn to follow the Teacher who has a heart that loves. We learn to make of this heart a heart of the world and to take the heart of the world to His Heart.

Without community, there is no visible witness of unity nor can justice exist. Without brotherly love in the community, being a follower is void and empty and becomes disincarnated religiosity and sterile, the world cannot convert into the Kingdom of Christ, a kingdom of liberty and peace, of justice, love and reconciliation. Without it there is no awareness of mission. It is in the ecclesial community where we hear the strong calling of the Lord to “leave the sacristy to go to the people”.

C. Dehonian Testimony

Being a disciple: a meeting place

I participate in the Dehonian Youth Mission which is God’s gift in my life, of discipleship and participation in Jesus’ mission. It was in this way of being Church that God has drawn me on the road of faith. Sometimes, we are absorbed in activities and we put aside that which is essential, or we study a lot, but we forget to give a living witness with our life following the example of our Teacher. Certainly, I believe that following Jesus is to do his will and model my attitudes according to His Heart.

Our Founder, Father Dehon, experienced in his life the discipleship of Christ on behalf of hundreds of people who suffered oppression and loss of personal dignity. Experiencing the love of the Heart of Jesus, he reached out to the hearts of so many workers who were being destroyed, exploited and crushed by the powerful employers of the industries of his time. Contemplating the Heart of Jesus and observing the realities around him, he lived his faith as an authentic and true disciple, without separating faith and life, gospel and reality, social and spiritual.

The Dehonian Youth Mission (MDG) provided me with this experience and made me see only the essential: Jesus the Teacher. Living with some young men, for a period of 15 days, it allowed me to feel how he lived with his disciples, and how his meetings transformed many lives., an experience we still have today.,

The first encounter which touched me was with the missionaries: young men who left their own homes, families, vacations, faculties...to dedicate the days of their lives to many people whom they did not know. But they were driven by love – love for their projects and the Dehonian charism – allowing themselves to be led by God, giving without measure to the work of evangelization.

The second encounter happened in the visits: to the lady who had not seen her son who had disappeared for three days; to the mother whose daughter is married to a international trafficker, who mistreats her daily; to the Catholic family who welcomes us and who prays with us. The encounters with Jesus keep happening, and I, as a disciple, have experienced, with the Teacher, the happiness we receive in our encounters with Him.

I have no doubt that love is the mission and the purpose of the life of all missionaries. Furthermore, I do not doubt that experiencing the dehonian spirituality makes it possible to love our Lord more and to serve Him better. The inspiration and source of the mission of Father Dehon has always been the Heart of Jesus. It is in the living testimony of Jesus in the Gospels, where we find the source of the pure and effective teachings to live the path of discipleship. The path that demands formation, permanent dialogue and attachment to the commitment of establishing the Kingdom of the Heart of Jesus. The MDJ and all the dehonians only realize their discipleship, their vocation-mission, when they allow themselves to enter into the life of Jesus and be changed by this love and become his witnesses as did our beloved Father Dehon.

The MDJ accomplished this in me. It made me more human, more Christian. It made me understand that my life each day should be an offering, a giving, and a dedication; it has taught me to place myself in someone else's shoes, before judging them; to discover in each smile, simple, humble, poor, abandoned...the smile of Jesus. The MDJ is an experience that is never erased from my heart, because it is the experience of Jesus that happens in me. I love the experience for the sufferings that it has caused me; furthermore, for the way this involvement has enriched me. Today I am certain that the MDJ is a way for the young to be Church, an experience of missionary discipleship. It is brought about more by the will of God than by the human will.

(Reginaldo Sturion, Taubate-SP – Brasil)

D. Discussion Points

Following Christ as his disciple is an essential dimension of the Church. However, there is a richness and plurality of the ways of living this following. What are the clues that dehonian spirituality provides to live as disciples of the Lord?

The Christian discipleship has a vital dynamic; it is impossible to follow Christ without action. To say it in just a few words: the road we travel gradually shows us his mission and goal. How is this formed in my experience as a disciple, identifying my life with the mission and the goal of Jesus?

Without an intimate relationship with Jesus, it is impossible to follow him. To assume his values and to follow his footsteps, requires my availability to be with Him in prayer, in contemplation. What have I done to grow in this challenge?

E. A Moment of Prayer

1. Hymn *(choice of the group, that should be related with the theme of the calling)*

Song of the book of Wisdom – Wis 9:1-6, 9-11 *(in alternate choral groups)*

V./ Lord, give me the wisdom.

God of my ancestors, merciful Lord, by your word you created everything. By your wisdom you made us human to rule all creation, to govern the world with holiness and righteousness, to administer justice with integrity.

V./ Lord, give me the wisdom.

Give me the wisdom that sits beside your throne; give me a place among your children. I am your slave, as was my mother before me. I am only human. I am not strong, and my life will be short. I have little understanding of the Law or how to apply it. Even if someone is perfect, he will be thought of as nothing without the Wisdom that comes from you.

V./ Lord, give me the wisdom.

Wisdom is with you and knows your actions; she was present when you made the world. She knows what pleases you, what is right and in accordance with your commands. Send her from the holy heavens, down from your glorious throne, so that she may work at my side, and I may learn what pleases you.

V./ Lord, give me the wisdom.

She knows and understands everything, and will guide me intelligently in what I do. Her glory will protect me.

(Silence to reflect on the prayer)

3. Word of God (Jn 1:35-43)

Proclamation of the Gospel according to John

The next day, John was standing there again with two of his disciples, when he saw Jesus walking by. "There is the Lamb of God!" he said. The two disciples heard him say this and went with Jesus. Jesus turned, saw them following him, and asked, "What are you looking for?" They answered, "Where do you live, Rabbi?" (This word means "Teacher"). "Come and see, he answered." (It was then about four o'clock in the afternoon). So they went with him and saw where he lived, and spent the rest of that day with him. One of them was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother. At once he found his brother Simon and told him, "We have found the Messiah." (This word means "Christ.") The he took Simon to Jesus. Jesus looked at him and said, "Your name is Simon son of John, but you will be called Cephas". (This is the same as Peter and means "a rock"). The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip and said to him, "Come with me!"

4. Spontaneous Prayers

Conclude with the *Our Father*....

5. Prayer of the Lay Dehonians

Lord Jesus, fountain of all that is good,

we thank you for having called us to participate and manifest
in the church and in society the dehonian spirituality.

As faithful laity, we want to learn from you the richness of the gospel,
and experience the mercy of your heart.

Help us to grow in faith and charity, especially attentive to the poor and needy,
to offer to all your kingdom of love.

Aware of this wounded world, filled with so many injustices,
help us to respond rapidly to your calling, as Father Dehon did:

"Here we are, Lord!"

In the difficult hours, support us with the gift of strength,

in the happy hours teach us to praise you, Father, with a happy heart.

At all times give us the grace of a heart such as yours.

Amen.

6. Final Hymn (a greeting for Mary)

Literature

- Pope Francis, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* (2013), especially the [numbers 19-24](#) ("A Church which goes forth") and [259-274](#) ("Personal encounter with the saving love of Jesus").
- Fifth General Conference of Bishops of Latin America and the Caribbean, *The Aparecida Document* (2007). Especially the numbers 129-153 ("The Vocation of Missionary Disciples to Holyness"), 209-215 ("Faithful laymen and laywomen"), and 431-475 ("Family, Persons, and Life").

Meeting XVII
**COMPANIONS ON THE JOURNEY:
THE SAINTS OF THE SACRED HEART**

Objectives of the meeting

- To alert all about the universal call to holiness
- The spirituality of the Sacred Heart as a path to holiness
- Fr. Dehon and the spirituality of the Sacred Heart
- The saints devoted to the Sacred Heart, companions of Fr. Dehon
- A Dehonian method for walking in holiness

Outline of the Meeting: strategies and activities

This session can begin with the presentation of photographs or images of the various saints. Baptism includes the call to holiness. The Christian life is a common path to holiness. But within this one path there exist various callings and particular charisms, both for one's personal sanctification and for the growth in holiness of the entire Church. In today's meeting we propose activities which will help you achieve these specific goals: to learn about the universal call to holiness, present specific paths in our common Christian life, present saints who demonstrate Sacred Heart spirituality, including Fr. Dehon, as models for our journey toward holiness.

Development of the Meeting

A. Welcome

After the initial greeting, participants will be asked to view images of various saints. Afterward, a song will be sung (based, if possible, on the Beatitudes) and all will be seated. At this point, the animator will invite the participants to speak briefly about a saint for whom they feel special devotion, or who has inspired them in their own path.

B. Reflection: *Companions on the Journey – The Saints of the Sacred Heart*

The animator will begin with a presentation, in PowerPoint or using images, of the "Saints of the Heart of Jesus" including Fr. Dehon, including birth and death dates, and, if possible, some words about the characteristics of their faith journey. Then he/she will ask the participants to share. This can be done either in the large group, or in small groups first, followed by sharing in the large group.

1. A Text from the Bible (Mt 5:1-12)

When he saw the crowds, he went up the mountain, and after he had sat down, his disciples came to him. He began to teach them, saying:

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are they who mourn, for they will be comforted.

Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the land.

Blessed are they who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be satisfied.

Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.

Blessed are the clean of heart, for they will see God.

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.

Blessed are they who are persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are you when they insult you and persecute you and utter every kind of evil against you [falsely] because of me. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward will be great in heaven. Thus they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

2. A Text from Fr. Dehon

“God has confided to me this work of the Heart of Jesus (that is, the congregation) God wills that I find my sanctification in this. God cannot wish that this Work be an obstacle for me. An instrument is chosen for its capacity, so I must work for Him. God begins the work, and entrusts it to a soul.

He commits himself to give this soul the special gifts, the graces, the necessary talents to achieve it.

Accordingly, I need to live according to his Reign and according to the Spirit of our Congregation.

... I must live in union with the Heart of Jesus. I must follow the divine inspirations. “*Lord, what would you have me do?*” (Ac 9,6) *What must I do, O Jesus, to show my love for you?*”

Resolution: to sanctify myself, hour by hour, for you.”

(NQT 25/30.32 [Retreat, July 23-27,1910])

Commentary

This text from the Diary of Fr. Dehon, taken from the notes of his spiritual exercises of 1910, shows us his willingness to achieve a way of holiness. It is very clear that he desires to construct a way of holiness, lived every day, as he states very simply: “to sanctify me hour by hour.” And his opening reference to the Work of the Heart of Jesus. It is there that his “Yes” to the Lord is fixed, that the way of sanctity must follow.

He does not lack in trust in God’s goodness, which will grant all the gifts necessary to follow this path. On the other hand, it is also true that he understands that this path is not followed alone, far from Jesus, but in his gaze, and always asking what will be God’s will for him. Finally, in the thought of Fr. Dehon, holiness is for each one of us the perfect conformity with the will of God in every moment. In Fr. Dehon’s words: “the life of the Sacred Heart in us is the “Reign of the Heart of Jesus in us.” (MSC 265.268 [21st day])

3. Theme for Reflection

3.1. The universal call to holiness

All Christians, of whatever class or condition are called to the fullness of Christian life and the perfection of charity, that is, of holiness. “Be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect” (Mt. 5,48). God, through his son, Jesus Christ, shares with the faithful the necessary strength to walk in holiness, obedient to his will in all things, consecrating themselves completely to his glory and the service of their neighbors. Thus the holiness of God’s people grows and gives fruit in the world, as shown in the history of the church, through the lives of many saints.

The progress in the way of holiness leads on to an ever more intimate and deep union with Christ, and through him, with the father and the Holy Spirit. God calls all to union with him, and to participate in his divine life.

The way of holiness passes through the Cross. Without renunciation and spiritual struggle, there is no holiness. Spiritual progress requires penance and mortification, which lead one gradually to live in the peace and the joy of the Beatitudes. This hope leads, through the mercy of God, to the great reunion in “The Holy City, the New Jerusalem” (Rev 21:2)

3.2. Christian life, the way of holiness

To be a Christian, to walk in holiness and attain the perfection of love, it is sufficient to live out one’s baptism, without forgetting the Commandments of the Old Law; to live one’s life according to the Gospel, which is the perfection, on earth, of the divine Law, both natural and revealed. This law is the work of Christ and finds its highest expression in the Sermon on the Mount, whose marvelous introduction are the Beatitudes.

It is also the grace of the Holy Spirit, given to the faithful by faith in Christ and which is based on the “commandment of love” to love each other as God has loved us. It is based more on the love poured out into us by the Holy Spirit, than on fear. If the Commandments tell us what to do, and what not to do, the Beatitudes (which Jesus lived before he proclaimed) open up to us limitless possibilities of holiness, which allow us to reach, as far as humanly possible, the holiness of God. Only God is truly poor, meek, thirsting for justice, merciful, pure, and peacemaking. Only God is holy, and the source of holiness. God’s presence in us, through the grace of baptism, gives us strength to live the Beatitudes.

3.3. The spirituality of the Heart of Jesus and holiness

In the Christian life all the baptized share the sanctifying grace which makes us able to believe in God, hope in him, and love him. (These are the theological virtues). It also graces us to share in the gifts of the Holy Spirit, and to grow in the moral virtues (prudence, justice, fortitude, and temperance).

Let us also add the Word of God, the Sacraments, and life in the Church. This set of gifts is a “spiritual organism” and necessary to live in holiness. In addition to these gifts, the Spirit gives particular charisms, which are necessary conditions for every Christian to live and grow in holiness. This is what we call “spirituality.” Thus we have the spirituality of the Heart of Jesus revealed to John the evangelist in the pierced heart.

This mystery was known to the Fathers of the Church and drew the attention of medieval mystics such as Saint Mechtilde, Saint Gertrude, Saint Bernard and Saint Bonaventure. In the Seventeenth Century, the revelations to Saint Margaret Mary popularized the devotion to the Heart of Jesus, with the practices of reparatory Eucharist, Holy Hours, chapter of faults, litanies, First Friday devotions, etc. Thus began what we now call Devotion to the Sacred Heart.

This devotion, or more properly called spirituality, has its roots in Holy Scripture. The open heart of the Redeemer, pierced by the lance on Good Friday, and shown to Thomas the following Sunday, became the symbol of love of God for humanity, and the flow of water and blood a fountain of love for the Church. To speak of the Heart of Jesus means to speak of a person who has loved us with all his love, human, divine, and Trinitarian, since he is truly human, son of Mary. We contemplate the love of the Father revealed not only in the pierced heart of Jesus; but also whenever he loves, feeds, heals, gives his life for all. God is love, revealed in the heart of his Son. This contemplation calls us to “walk in the Spirit” (cf. Gal.5,16), to walk in love and holiness.

3.4. Fr. Dehon and the spirituality of the Heart of Jesus.

In his memoirs, Fr. Dehon calls it a “great grace” (NHV 1/6) of God to have been initiated, by his mother, in “the love of the divine Heart” of Jesus (NHV 1/8). In this way, he wished to live his life united with Jesus: “To live united with Jesus who lives in me is the spiritual practice which helps me the most”, he writes in his diary (NQT 4/155 [April 18, 1887]) “Union with Our Lord is the best orientation... I have been wounded by your love, and you have had me united with you for a long time... Grant me this union, O Lord, my only treasure, my intimate and pure joy” (NQT 24/63 [May 1909])

This intimate union with the Heart of Christ, especially in its love for the Father and for humans, was expressed in the Apostolate, characterized by an extreme dedication to humans, especially the most vulnerable, and by a concern to respond actively to the pastoral needs of the Church (cf. Const. SCJ 4-5)

The Eucharist, so important in the spirituality of the Heart of Jesus, was for Fr. Dehon the model of his holiness, leading him to seek to transform his entire life into one never-ending Mass, in an oblation of reparative love for the Father, for the sake of men (cf. CAM 3/64). For Dehonians, therefore, to be holy means to be Eucharist, oblation, offering “for Christ, with Christ, and in Christ, for the joy and glory of God, for the salvation of humanity.” (cf. Constitutions SCJ 25)

3.5. A Dehonian way to walk in holiness

In his book *Studies on the Sacred Heart* Fr. Dehon presents “a way of the interior life” (ESC II ch. XX 1) Today we prefer the term “a way of life walking in the Spirit,” toward holiness. Basically, all is summed up in “a life in union with the Heart of Jesus,” “our home, our light, our altar and our victim.” Today we might say “our offering.”

The **first step** consists in **making Jesus “our home”**. “Behold the wound in my side, where I will give you a true and lasting dwelling,” said Jesus to St. Margaret Mary. Fr. Dehon adds: this union is prepared by our efforts, penance, recollection, meditation on our Lord and his divine Heart, sealed by a reciprocal love.

The **second step** consists in **making Jesus “our light.”** He is the light for our path; studying his love to inspire us to love him. Love and light; our soul will find in this habitual union all the elements for its sanctification.

The **third step** consists in **making Jesus our altar and our offering**. In union with the Heart of Jesus and through him we offer our sacrifices, our reparation to the Father. This method was recommended by Our Lord to Margaret Mary. It was also practiced by Saint Gertrude. St. John Eudes was pleased to offer God the love of the Heart of Jesus as reparation for sin and give glory to God (cf. ESC, pp. 689-692).

3.6 Fr. Dehon and the saints of the Sacred Heart

In the *Spiritual Directory*, Fr. Dehon names certain saints which he calls “of the Heart of Jesus”: St. Michael, St. John the Baptist, St. Augustine, St. Frances de Sales, St. Francis of Assisi, St. Gertrude, St. Mechtild, St. Margaret Mary. “These are our models, protectors and friends, whom we should honor, love, console, and invoke before the Sacred Heart.” (DSP 141). In his book “*The Month of the Sacred Heart*,” written in 1903, after the meditation of the first day he represents “the apostles of the Heart of Jesus” , St. Gertrude, St. Mechtild, St. Margaret Mary, and St. John Eudes –

in that era, Venerable – (cf. MSC 19-22). In the meditation for the second day, Fr. Dehon presents the “Saints of the Heart of Jesus,” including the three he had previously labeled “apostles.” He also added others such as St. Ignatius, St. Claude de la Colombière, St. Louis Gonzaga, St. Francis de Sales, and St. Jane de Chantal (cf. MSC 34-48)

Let us examine these saints, beginning with those he named “apostles.” For Fr. Dehon, they experienced the love of the Heart of Jesus in their lives and announced, in their time, the marvels of this “Heart which has so loved people.”

St. Mechtild (1241-1299) received, while in the monastery of Helfta, revelations of the Heart of Jesus. She loved to place her head on the breast of the Lord, who told her: “I will give you my heart as a place of refuge.” We recall this gesture of resting the head on the breast of the Lord from the Last Supper (cf. John 13,23-25). The spirituality of the Heart of Jesus, as we have seen, has for its basic attitude the search for an intimate union with the Lord, expressed by the scene in which the “beloved disciple” rests his head upon the breast of Jesus. Fr. Dehon sees in this gesture his path to holiness: an intimate union with Christ.

St. Gertrude (1256-1302) entered the monastery at Helfta at the age of five and had St. Mechtild as her teacher. In 1281 she received the call to make known the Heart of Jesus by writing a book of her revelations. In these encounters, St. John the Evangelist told her that the revelation of the Heart of Jesus was reserved for these latter times, when the world was consumed by egoism and coldness, and therefore needed the love of Jesus. For her, the Heart of Jesus was a treasure to be shared. She fervently wished to unite her will in all things with the will of the Heart of Jesus to the point of renouncing completely her own interest, to serve in the mission to announce God’s love to her neighbor. For Gertrude, holiness is a gift to the church, not to be conserved, but to participate in the redemptive work of Christ.

St. John Eudes (1601-1680) was very esteemed by Fr. Dehon as the first apostle of the devotion to the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary. He organized and celebrated for the first time the feast of the Heart of Jesus and the Immaculate Heart of Mary, and composed a liturgy of the Hours for this celebration. Between 1640 and 1680, John Eudes included, in every mission, devotion to the two Hearts, establishing everywhere confraternities in honor of the Hearts of Jesus and Mary. In 1623 John Eudes joined the Congregation of the Oratory, founded by Cardinal Pierre de Bérulle. In 1643 he founded an association of diocesan priests, with the name “Congregation of Jesus and Mary.”

Fr. Dehon, while a student in Paris, and a seminarian in Rome, was helped by these priests to study books of the “French school” of spirituality, begun by Cardinal de Bérulle, which had teachers such as Frs. Olier, John Eudes, and Libermann.

This spiritual movement was concerned with the sanctification of the clergy, and through the influence of John Eudes, cultivated devotion to the Heart of Jesus. The young Dehon found in the “French school” of spirituality the motivation and support for his spiritual journey, and in his apostolate of catechesis of children and poor youth. This synthesis of spirituality, mission, and social aid to the needy will distinguish all of his life and works, as happened with St. John Eudes, who founded the Congregation of Our Lady of Refuge for the redemption of young prostitutes.

St. Margaret Mary Alacoque (1647-1690) is recognized by Fr. Dehon as an apostle of the Heart of Jesus. She was a religious of the Order of the Visitation, founded by St. Francis de Sales, and lived in the convent at Paray-le-Monial. In 1673, on the feast of St. John the Evangelist, during the adoration of the Blessed Sacrament, she experienced the first of many visions of the Heart of Jesus

who told her: “This is the Heart that has loved men so much, and for the most part has received nothing more than ingratitude.”

These visions initially provoked incredulity, calumnies, and negative judgments, until she found St. Claude de la Colombière as her spiritual director, who asked her to write down these revelations. Thus the religious community of Paray-le-Monial became a center for the spread of this devotion.

This Saint offered herself as a victim to the Heart of Jesus to answer with love this infinite love. Her means were the sacrament of reconciliation, the cross, and obedience. Fr. Dehon followed her example and chose Eucharistic adoration as part of his mission of reparation, offering himself to the Heart of Jesus as a victim, complete and until death, if necessary.

St. Térèse of the Child Jesus (1873-1897) born in Alençon, France; child of Louis Martin and Zélie Guérin, who were proclaimed saints by Pope Francis in 2015. At the age of 15 she entered the Carmel at Lisieux. She lived a life of intense prayer and contemplation, dedicated to the missions and missionaries. She lived the “little way” of spiritual childhood, and dedicated herself to the infinite Love of God. Fr. Dehon knew and admired the spirituality of Sister Térèse, and recognized it as his own.

Shortly before his death, he wrote: “we have been born from the spirit of St. Margaret Mary, and grow toward that of Térèse. We follow this attraction inspired by grace.” (NQT 45/68-72 [April 1925]). After these words, Fr. Dehon described the formula of this “little saint” as a victim of total offering of merciful love (cf. CAM 3/213-218; NQT 34/178-179 [August 20, 1912]). She was canonized by Pope Pius XI in 1925 and afterwards proclaimed patron of the missions. In 1998, Pope St. John Paul II proclaimed her Doctor of the Church.

Blessed Elizabeth of the Trinity (1880-1906) was born in Dijon, France. In 1901 she entered the Carmel in her city. Enamored of Christ, whom she considered “her favorite book,” she allowed the Holy Trinity to fill her whole being, to the point of disappearing herself. She wrote: “The Trinity has its home in me, which I can never leave.” In another place she writes: “I have found heaven here on earth; heaven is God, and God is my soul. When I understood this, everything was illumined in me.” (Letter 122).

Fr. Dehon read the life of Elizabeth in 1915 and was greatly impressed by her, especially for her relationship with the Trinity; he describes this in his journal (NQT 36/27-43 [Jan 1915]). In his later years, Fr. Dehon lived an intense Trinitarian life. This is clearly seen in his last journal [Notes Quotidiennes]. Another idea that Fr. Dehon found in Elizabeth was that she “wished to be a mediator with Jesus Christ, to be a new humanity through whom he could continue his life of reparation, sacrifice, adoration, and praise” (NQT 36/42 [Jan 1915]). She was beatified by St. John Paul II on the feast of Christ the King in 1984. On that occasion, the Holy Father said, “To our disoriented humanity, which does not encounter God and misunderstands him, who seeks a word it can trust, Elizabeth shows a disposition toward the word of God, which she assimilated to the point of being nourished by it in her prayer, and finding in it her whole reason for being, to praise his glory.” (*Homily of Pope John Paul II, Nov. 11, 1984*)

3.7. Texts of Fr. Dehon concerning some saints of the Heart of Jesus

St. Mechtild

Union with the Sacred Heart — Our Lord revealed to St. Matilde and St. Margaret Mary a constant union with his Sacred Heart. He asked that they unite themselves to him in everything, in all their actions. “Offer to God the Father your intentions, your prayers, your desires, in union with mine. I will lift it to God and he will be pleased, just as perfume of incense rises to heaven, and just as gold is purified by fire. I give you my heart so that you might love God and love every creature for

God... With my heart you can always praise me. Do not be ashamed of your poverty; everything that is mine is yours.” “Then – she said – because I have your love, I offer it to you..” He responded: “You must do this.” You will say: “O my God, I praise you; make up for what is lacking in my praise. Offer to the Father the love of your heart.” (ASC 11/167 [Nov 19])

St. Gertrude

“The sanctification of the Sacred Heart – St. Gertrude kneeling before the cross, received the first favor of the Heart of Jesus. “I saw a beam of light emerge from the side of Jesus, sharp as an arrow, penetrate me and then withdraw. This continued for some time, drawing all my affection toward him. Finally, desperately, I told Our Lord: “Your arrow has wounded my heart.” He responded “ I wish all your affections to flow toward me. This is where they should all meet.” From that moment, the Sacred Heart became her teacher and revealed himself to her, especially in the Eucharist.

St. Margaret Mary

“An early vision and its fruits – Margaret Mary loved to meditate on the passion of our Savior and on the Eucharist. She also was drawn to the hidden life of our Lord. She meditated on his silence, his humility, and the immolation of the Christ Child... Since our Lord preferred to have her feel the love with which his Divine Heart burned during his infancy, he appeared to her as a child. The Blessed Virgin presented her child to him... St. Margaret also invites us to imitate the humility and silence of the Child. Like him, we wish to live a hidden life in which we wish nothing for ourselves. By her example we wish to be immolated on the altar of the heart of our Blessed Mother.. Love was the principle of her immolation. We also live in a spirit of love.” (ASC1/276-279 [Jan 31])

St. John Eudes

In his first book about the Heart of Jesus published in 1670, Fr. Eudes explained all the sentiments which Margaret Mary would receive shortly afterwards; uniting reparation and love. He tells us that one of the sentiments of the Heart of Jesus which most deserves our devotion is the immense agony, beginning with Calvary and lasting, even if possible, even into heaven. He shows us in the Heart of Jesus the altar of his divine love, the city of refuge of faithful hearts, and the treasure of all grace and reparation (ASC 8/184 [Aug 19])

St. Thérèse of the Child Jesus

“There are humble souls who are absorbed by love and no longer desire sufferings to atone for the sins of the world” said St. Thérèse of the Child Jesus, who died in the odor of sanctity on September 30, 1897. “Certainly these souls practice abandonment to God; they accept and love the crosses which Our Lord sends; but they do not ask to be led through the path of suffering.”

On June 9, 1895 she offered herself as a victim of love, thus: “*To live in an act of perfect love, I offer myself as a victim to your merciful love, asking to be ceaselessly consumed, overwhelmed by the waves of your mercy, so that I become a martyr of love, O my God! May this martyrdom, having prepared me to appear before you, and when I die, may I rest in your eternal love! I wish, O my love, with every heartbeat, renew this offering, until, when shadows have passed, I may show you my love in eternity.*” (CAM 3/213.217)

Blessed Elizabeth of the Trinity

Fr. Dehon writes: “I have read with great pleasure the life of Blessed Elizabeth of the Trinity, of the Carmel of Dijon... The most significant grace is the union with God which lives in her, as she says, her inner heaven. She was fed by St. Paul, who speaks of this interior life:

I am going to tell you my secret” she says. “Think of this God who lives in us, of whom we are the temple; St. Paul tells us, and we should believe. Little by little the soul becomes accustomed to live in his divine company; understand that there is a little heaven in which God dwells; she breathes this divine atmosphere, and I would say only her body lives on earth; her soul lives beyond this veil, in the One who is unchanging.”

“Love lives in us” she says. “My only exercise is to enter into my interior and be lost in the Trinity who dwells there. In fact, I, Elizabeth of the Trinity, am disappearing, invaded by the Three. Let us immolate ourselves more and more, without seeking the extraordinary, and we will become very small, carried like a child in arms of its mother, by the One who is our all.” (NQT 36/27.33-34 [January 1915])

C. Dehonian Testimony

Noemi Sotelo de Valencia, of Santo Cristo parish of Buenos Aires, a lay Dehonian working in diocesan youth missions and in other pastoral activities, writes:

“I am a lay Dehonian who seeks to live the spirituality of the Heart of Jesus and I am committed in the environment where I live and work, as Fr. Dehon taught, in the path of St. John Eudes. I am the principal of a public school, whose students come from high-risk situations; poverty, broken families, in poor housing, victims of abuse, of drug abuse and with little hope for the future. I embrace each one, seeing in them a gift of the Heart of Jesus, calling me to commit myself each day, to say “yes.”

I have known Marianna since I began my teaching career. She did not have friends, and was abused. She was aggressive, always getting into trouble. One day I called her in to my office and I scolded her severely. Among other things I told her that she was a disgrace to her mother. She broke into tears and I realized that I was treating her badly. I asked her forgiveness and I asked her to sit on the balcony and tell me her story. I understood that she needed more to be listened to than to be scolded. She never knew her father. Her mother was dying of cancer and she felt totally alone. I felt bad; this was the worst shock of my life.

Later on, Marianna left school so she could support herself. Once or twice a month she would pass by the school and tell me her problems. She found herself among people, lonely like herself, and in which drugs and prostitution were quick solutions. She no longer visited me. Although I invited her to finish her studies, I could not get her to return to school. She had decided she was a lesbian and thought for that reason I would no longer speak with her. The first occasion I told her that I did not agree with her choice, but I still would wait for her at the school.

At that moment, she saw the cross I wore around my neck and asked if Christ would have forgiven the type of life she led. I responded that he had already forgiven her and that he was waiting for her to change her ways. I gave her the cross and I told her that she was not alone, that Christ loved her more than I could. More than ten years passed. Marianna appeared again and asked if I was willing to accept her into the school. She was glowing with joy and I enrolled her. Almost twenty years after our first encounter, two years ago, I gave her the diploma and I can recall, as though it were yesterday, the face of Marianna who burst into tears and taught me how to listen.

God dwells in the heart of every person, no matter what their situation. I am sure that I discovered that in the heart of Marianna and I am grateful for that surprise. I realized that “*whatever you do to the least of my brothers or sisters, you have done for me.*” (Mt 25,40). Union with Christ comes

through the Word, prayer, Eucharist, and in love for all people, especially the poor and those who suffer.

D. Discussion Points

After the presentation of the theme, and readings from Fr. Dehon, the group may share their impressions of the presentation.

- Every baptized person is called to holiness. What is the path to holiness?
- In the common path to holiness, God shares individual charisms and graces which help each one to contribute to the holiness of the Church. What charisms do you recognize?
- What for you is the characteristic of the spirituality of the Heart of Jesus?
- Which saint discussed impresses you in a special way?
- How does the “life” of Fr. Dehon impress you?

E. A Moment of Prayer

1. Hymn

2. Introduction

Let us call on God’s Spirit of Holiness; let us thank God for the gifts given to the Church, especially the saints we have presented, especially Venerable Fr. Dehon. May they be for us an inspiration in following our path of holiness.

3. Word of God (Mt 5:1-12)

When he saw the crowds, he went up the mountain, and after he had sat down, his disciples came to him. He began to teach them, saying:

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are they who mourn, for they will be comforted.

Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the land.

Blessed are they who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be satisfied.

Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.

Blessed are the clean of heart, for they will see God.

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.

Blessed are they who are persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are you when they insult you and persecute you and utter every kind of evil against you [falsely] because of me. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward will be great in heaven. Thus they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

(After a few moments of silence, participants may repeat one of the Beatitudes)

4. Psalm 24

Response: **This is the people who seeks the Lord.**

The earth is the Lord’s and all it holds,
the world and those who dwell in it.

For he founded it on the seas,
established it over the rivers.

Who may go up the mountain of the Lord?
Who can stand in his holy place?
The clean of hand and pure of heart,
who has not given his soul to useless things, what is vain.
He will receive blessings from the Lord,
and justice from his saving God.

Such is the generation that seeks him,
that seeks the face of the God of Jacob.

5. Litany of the Saints of the Heart of Jesus

Sacred Heart of Jesus,	<i>have mercy on us</i>
Immaculate Heart of Mary,	<i>pray for us</i>
St. Joseph, patron and model of the friends of the Heart of Jesus,	<i>pray for us</i>
St. Michael, herald of the Heart of Jesus,	<i>pray for us</i>
St. John the Evangelist, beloved disciple of the Heart of Jesus,	<i>pray for us</i>
St. Augustine, cantor of love of the Heart of Jesus,	<i>pray for us</i>
St. Matilde, friend of the Heart of Jesus,	<i>pray for us</i>
St. Gertrude, teacher of the love of Christ,	<i>pray for us</i>
St. Francis of Assisi, twin heart of Jesus,	<i>pray for us</i>
St. Francis de Sales, humble as the Lord,	<i>pray for us</i>
St. Jane de Chantal, promoter of the Heart of Jesus,	<i>pray for us</i>
St. Luis Gonzaga, saint of the Heart of Jesus,	<i>pray for us</i>
St. Francis Xavier, missionary of the Gospel,	<i>pray for us</i>
St. John Eudes, apostle of the Hearts of Jesus and Mary,	<i>pray for us</i>
St. Margaret Mary, confidante of the Heart of Jesus,	<i>pray for us</i>
St. Claude de la Colombière, master of the devotion to the Heart of Jesus,	<i>pray for us</i>
St. Thérèse of the Child Jesus, dedicated to divine love,	<i>pray for us</i>
Blessed Elizabeth of the Trinity, teacher of life in God,	<i>pray for us</i>
Blessed Juan Maria de la Cruz, martyr for the cause of love of God,	<i>pray for us</i>
Venerable Leo Dehon, apostle of the Heart of Jesus,	<i>pray for us</i>
All angels and archangels,	<i>pray for us</i>
All Saints of God,	<i>pray for us</i>

6. Prayer

We conclude by praying together:
Lord Jesus,
With all our fellow Christians,
we proclaim that you are the New Human One,
in whom the Father manifests his love.
By the Incarnation
you are united with all humans.

You thin with the mind of us humans,
you act with the heart of us humans,
You love with the heart of us humans.

You are made exactly as one of us,
In all things you are like us, except in sin.
Your way is our way,
this is the one we wish to take.

Allow us to live the grace of Baptism,
aware of the vocation and mission that you confided to us.

In imitation of the saints of your Heart,
especially of the Venerable Fr. Dehon,
we wish to make the union with you in your love
for the Father and for all people,
the principle and center of our lives.

We ask you:
Makes us grow in your love,
by being able to respond to those who suffer and who find themselves in need.

Give us the grace to involve ourselves
in the works of justice and peace,
so that thus be realized the reign of your Heart
in souls and in societies, Amen.

7. Final Hymn

The meeting ends with a hymn of thanksgiving

Literature

Meeting XVIII

FR. DEHON AND PRAYER

Objectives of the Meeting

- To know Fr. Dehon as a man of prayer, and his preferred ways to pray
- To inspire the practice of Eucharistic adoration and “never-ending Eucharist.”
- To learn to pray from Fr. Dehon, especially in the Eucharist, and through the Word of God.

Outline of the Meeting: strategies and activities

As we experience more deeply the experience of faith of the Founder, we see him as a man of prayer. In prayer, Fr. Dehon sought union with the Heart of Jesus .He often lamented not having enough time to meditate on Scripture and to contemplate the mysteries of the life of Christ.

In this gathering, we suggest the Lectio Divina as a practical way of praying the Word of God. Fr. Dehon often used the Ignatian method of prayer with Scripture, but he added: “There are many methods, but if the Holy Spirit gives light, let us not be too attached to the method.” (NHV 5/161). Let each one follow their best method; what is important is to listen to God.

Development of the Meeting

A. Welcome

After all have been seated, invite the group to pause for a moment of silence. Background music may be helpful; at the end, a short verse may be chanted, such as “*Misericordias Domini in aeternum cantabo*” (Taizé). This is followed by a Gospel reading and one from Fr. Dehon:

B. Reflection: *Fr. Dehon and Prayer*

1. A Text from the Bible (Lk 11:1-13)

He was praying in a certain place, and when he had finished, one of his disciples said to him, “Lord, teach us to pray just as John taught his disciples.”* He said to them, “When you pray, say:

Father,

hallowed be your name,

your kingdom come.

Give us each day our daily bread

and forgive us our sins for we ourselves forgive everyone in debt to us,

and do not subject us to the final test.”

And he said to them, “Suppose one of you has a friend to whom he goes at midnight and says, ‘Friend, lend me three loaves of bread, for a friend of mine has arrived at my house from a journey and I have nothing to offer him,’ and he says in reply from within, ‘Do not bother me; the door has already been locked and my children and I are already in bed. I cannot get up to give you anything.’ I tell you, if he does not get up to give him the loaves because of their friendship, he will get up to give him whatever he needs because of his persistence.

“And I tell you, ask and you will receive; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks, receives; and the one who seeks, finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened. What father among you would hand his son a snake when he asks for a fish? Or hand him a scorpion when he asks for an egg? If you then, who are wicked, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the Father in heaven give the holy Spirit* to those who ask him?”

2. A Text from Fr. Dehon

“*“Si quid petieritis Patrem meum in nomine meo, dabit vobis’* – ‘Whatever you ask of my Father, he will give you in my name.’ (Jn 16:23) We pray unceasingly, because we always need God’s help. In peace, we ask the Lord to stay with us as we praise him. In tribulation, we ask for peace of heart, the light of the Spirit, and faithfulness to the rule.” (NHV 5/159)

“Let us pray with faith in the name of Our Lord. *‘Petite et accipietis’* – ‘Ask and you will receive.’ (Jn 16:24) We are as certain of being heard as a child who asks bread from his Father. If God declines the grace we ask, it is because of the danger of pride; but God gives us another grace. Let us ask for the humility to accept the rest of the virtues. Humility is the base of the edifice; the larger the base, the easier it is to build.” (NQT 1/70)

“Let us invoke our Lord with confidence, with perseverance, as did the Canaanite woman (see Mt 7:28). Every prayer brings us fruit, even if we do not see it immediately. No one asks the Lord in vain. The sufferings which he sends us, as to the Canaanite, are the opportunities of greater graces. Let us learn how to use them. Let us live in the presence of God, considering life as a day which God has given us to choose our eternity” (NQT 1/83).

“Mental prayer is the principal exercise of piety. It is as necessary as vocal prayer, for without meditation we will not know what to ask.” (St. Alphonsus Liguori; St. Theresa). This is for the priest the only source for the spirit of faith and the anointing of love. Only this can make his ministry fruitful. It nourishes charity: *‘in meditatione exardescit ignis’* – ‘in meditation your fire burned me.’ (Ps 38:4) We think we do not have time; we must have time for God and meet him abundantly... Our meditation must be always ready. But we cannot attach ourselves rigorously to the methods of meditation; but the Holy Spirit communicates us His Light without asking of us any great activities. We unite all in union with our Lord.” (NQT 1/120).

(After the reflection, leave a moment to gather personal thoughts; then give each one a chance to share what has arisen in their heart.)

3. Theme for Reflection

“Prayer is the raising of one’s mind and heart to God or the requesting of good things from God.”⁹ “For me, prayer is a surge of the heart; / it is a simple look turned toward heaven, / it is a cry of recognition and of love, / embracing both trial and joy.”¹⁰ Whatever the language of prayer (gestures or words), it is the whole person who prays. According to the scriptures, prayer can bud forth from the soul or the spirit, but most often from the heart. It is the heart which prays; the heart, our hidden center, is accessible to our reason, and to others; only the Spirit of God can scrutinize

⁹ St. John Damascene, *De fide orthodoxa*, 3, 24: PG 94,1089C.

¹⁰ St. Therese of Lisieux, *Manuscrits autobiographiques*, C 25r.

and know it. It is the place of truth, where we choose death or life. It is the place of encounter, of the covenant between God and ourselves. It springs up from us, lifted by the Spirit, directed to the Father.

Giving God our time, we open to God's presence, to God's love, to his union with Jesus. In our Christian life we pray with the community in Liturgy: "Our Father." But it is also important to develop our personal prayer: "My Father."

There are many obstacles to personal daily prayer: fatigue, lack of time, routine, superficiality, discouragement. There are distractions which no one can avoid, but one can also integrate them into one's prayer: pray your distractions! Pride, also, can convince one that there is no need for prayer. Only a humble heart can pray.

To pray is not to mechanically repeat formulas. Prayer is above all putting oneself in the presence of the Lord in an attitude of listening, of seeking God's will and to respond to what God tells us, to God's plan of love for us and for the world. This response can be given in silence, uniting one's self to God's love. One can also praise, give thanks, adore, ask forgiveness, submit to God's will, with words or groans.

The "Our Father" is not only the most excellent prayer, but the model of all Christian prayer, which follows its structure. The "Our Father" is the prayer of Jesus, which invites us to live in communion.

To obtain a life of prayer, one must be in the habit of living in God's presence, in union with God, as Fr. Dehon reminds us: "To put oneself into the presence of God, in union with God, from this depends all success in prayer." (DSP 222). Added to this are short prayers during the day, such as ejaculations, which lift our minds to God. Fr. Dehon appreciated this type of prayer, along with devotion to Mary, the daily rosary, and devotion to the Saints.

3.1. Biblical prayer

The Word of God is the source of Christian prayer. (cf. DV 21). While still a young student in Paris, Fr. Dehon accepted the counsel of his spiritual director, Fr. Boute – "Read every day, with a commentary on the Bible." (NHV 1/35) – and woke up early each morning, to do what we call "Biblical prayer." Later on, as a seminarian and as a priest, he favored Ignatian meditation and Biblical meditation. In our day, we often use the method called "*Lectio Divina*." Inspired by the Fathers of the Church, this method, organized by Guigues II of the Cathusian monastery, was used since the Middle Ages up until the Protestant Reformation.

After the Reformation, it was practically forgotten. The Second Vatican Council restored and recommended it (cf. DV 25). It is a method which gives depth to the Word of God, has a communal dimension, and leads to the progressive interiorization of the Word, which leads to apostolic discernment.

This method is a type of ladder, (called in Latin *scala claustralium*, i.e. "the ladder of monks") which has various levels and which leads from earth to heaven. It begins with a brief prayer and invocation of the Holy Spirit, which one can make using formulas like, "Lord, your servant is listening", "Open my lips", "Send your spirit", or "Come, Lord Jesus."

The four principal steps

The first is **Lectio**, or **reading**, which requires an adequate time of silence: “Close your door” said Jesus (Mt. 6,6). Even when praying in a group, an atmosphere of silence is essential. Do not use a text at random; it is preferable to read the texts of the day, or of the Sunday Liturgy. One can also use a continuous text from the Gospels, the Epistles, or the Acts of the Apostles. This reading should be heard as though it were for the first time by all who listen. The question one should ask oneself at this point is: “What does this Word say to us?”, or “What does the Lord say?” The goal is to understand the text in its context.

The second step is **meditation**: once one has understood the text in its context, one must meditate, ruminate, to “chew” on the Word of God to enjoy its flavor and absorb its substance. It is this meditation which permits us to assimilate the Word, to put it into practice in our daily life, face difficult choices, apply it to the situation in which one is living, to illuminate and understand the problems and difficulties which preoccupy us. The question one should pose in this step is: “What do you wish to tell me Lord, in my life, my situation, and my problems?”

The third step is **oratio: prayer**. To praise, give thanks, bless God who always reveals himself: The psalms, which are the biblical prayers which Jesus himself used, may be helpful here. The question at this step is: “What does this Word lead me to respond?”

If the Lectio Divina is done in group, it is helpful to **read the reading aloud and share** one’s reflections. Afterward, leave a space for spontaneous sharing of all. The atmosphere of silence and prayer should lead you to experience the presence of the Master, who is present wherever two or three are gathered in his name (Mt 18:20). You can conclude with the Lord’s Prayer or another prayer which one of the members wishes to share with the group.

The fourth step is **contemplation**. This can be done by the whole group, in silence, or afterward. If one wishes to pray before the Blessed Sacrament, or holding the Scriptures, or with the use of an image. Keep one’s interior gaze fixed on the mysteries of God present in one’s life, or the life of Mary or another saint. Contemplation is, above all, being open to God’s presence, illuminating one’s heart, filling it with love, joy, strength, enthusiasm, happiness.

Finally, the experience of the living God should lead us to **action**, to missionary activity, to service of one’s neighbors, and other actions inspired by the spirit.

3.2. Prayer of abandonment

In addition to scriptural prayer, Fr. Dehon used and recommended the prayer of abandonment, which requires a deeper level of spiritual life. “Let us imitate the humility and spirit of abandonment of Mary and Joseph” (CAM 1/175) This form of prayer consists not so much in asking for what we want, but rather to trust in Him and abandon ourselves to His will, seeking only that which will fulfill God’s will. The prayer of abandonment is shown in phrases like: “Here I am, Lord; what do you ask of me?”

This prayer of abandonment supposes an experience of God’s love and providence which never fails us, which is present in every moment of our life. It also trusts that God will not ask of us the impossible, and if He asks difficult things, that He will also give us the strength to do it. Jesus gives us the example of this prayer in Gethsemane; he prays, “Father! If you wish, let this cup pass me by; but let not my will be done, but yours.” (Lk 22:42) His father sent an angel to strengthen him (Lk 22:43). This act of abandonment freed him from the “sorrow and distress” (Mt 26:37) and

enabled him to serenely face his suffering and death. On the cross, he completed his life with the prayer of abandonment: “Father, into your hands I commend my spirit.” (Lk 23:46).

3.3. Contemplative prayer

There are other types of prayer: spoken prayer, mental prayer, contemplation. We have spoken of Centering Prayer. One form of prayer which Fr. Dehon loved was contemplating the mysteries of the life of Jesus, in order to feel within himself the sentiments of the Heart of Jesus incarnate. Eucharistic adoration was a special moment for him. During the Eucharist, he looked within the pierced heart; “They shall look upon him whom they have pierced.” (Jn 19:37).

Eucharistic adoration is not time wasted, as Judas called the perfumed oil which Mary poured on the feet of Jesus (Jn 12:3). Evangelization must grow out of contemplation. It offers us a climate of peace, of abandonment, and total confidence in God. Our life is filled with meaning: “Seek his face and you will be radiant.” (Ps 34:6) For Fr. Dehon, the great mystery is the pierced Heart. Beyond the wounds, the buffets and spitting, Fr. Dehon found the limitless love of Jesus, the spirit of oblation to his Father (cf. CAM 1/151). Fr. Dehon writes: “God is love. St. John saw this in the Heart of Jesus pierced on the cross.” (ASC 3/425 [Good Friday])

From the cross, Jesus heard curses and blasphemies. His love was not answered. So he asks for reparation, our response, which struggles against sin and structures of sin: injustice, war, hunger, corruption... We are invited to enter into this reparatory movement of Jesus, with him for the “reconstruction” of mankind, and of the world. This is another form of reparation.

In our response to the love of the Heart of Jesus, sentimentality is not enough. We must live it patiently through the trials of life and in our commitment to service of our brothers and sisters.

At the foot of the cross stood John and Mary who represents the church, who unite themselves to Jesus in the redemption of the world. From his open side and pierced heart flow blood and water (Jn 19:34). The blood is constantly offered by Christ in the Eucharist. The water symbolizes life, divine life, through which we participate in Jesus, through baptism. This is the living water promised to the Samaritan woman (Jn 4:13-15). Jesus says, “Whoever thirsts, let them come to me and drink.” (Jn 7,37-39).

The pierced Heart of Jesus is, for John, the central act of the passion and death of Jesus. He gives testimony that he has seen, because we believe in the love of Christ, who loved us (Jn 3:16ff) to the end (Jn 13:1). This open Heart is the new way to reach the Father. In Eucharistic adoration, we can offer a response of love.

3.4. Intercessory prayer

In the tortured face of Jesus on the cross, Fr. Dehon invites us to contemplate the faces of so many victims of violence, of wars, hunger, injustice, abuse, marginalization, and, at root, of sin. The contemplation of the Heart of Jesus in the cross leads us to intercede for the conversion of sinners, to defense of the poor, the sick, elderly, of whoever is persecuted.

For Fr. Dehon, Eucharistic adoration is not only a contemplative pause, but a service of intercession in the name of the Church, as in the Liturgy of the Hours: “My last word will be to recommend daily adoration, reparatory adoration, in the name of the Church, to console our Lord and realize the Reign of the Sacred Heart in souls and in nations.” (DSP 482). This is to intercede for one another. This is the priestly prayer par excellence, which builds a bridge between God and people, as

Abraham and Moses did, and uniquely, Christ. It is to ask forgiveness, give thanks and praise, offer sacrifices to God for those who do not do so.

With baptism, thanks to our common priesthood, we receive the capacity to represent our brothers and sisters before God, to intercede along with Christ, the One intercessor, who on the cross prayed even for his persecutors (cf. Lk 23:34). This is not a question of the value of our own merits, but to confide in the mercy of God and pray for all.

“Intercede” means to intervene for the sake of another, to ask that God will not cut down the sterile plant (Lk 13:6-9). The intercession reaches there where words or actions are insufficient. Only the intercession of the Church can break the vicious circle of sin; one trapped by sin is neither aware of it, nor able to escape. Many believe in the communion of saints, that the faithfulness of a few can lead many to salvation. There is a moment in the Mass, the prayer of the faithful, in which this desire for the salvation of all is expressed.

C. Dehonian Testimony

From adolescence, I have known the Priests of the Sacred Heart, from whom I learned to love and live the Dehonian charism. Fr. Dehon was a great inspiration in my life. I soon was invited to join the MDJ, the Dehonian Youth Mission. This put me into contact with Fr. Dehon and inspired me to deepen my experience of the Dehonian charism. Today, I am very thankful to the Congregation which has helped me to know this great person who dedicated himself completely to the Reign of God. Through his writings, I have understood his love of the Reign of God and his desire to realize this in hearts and in society. How much did he desire that the Heart of Jesus be known and loved in the whole world!

In one mission led by the MDJ, I visited the house of a lady who greeted me with great warmth and invited me to share the Word of God and bless her house. I felt the power of the presence of God in my life and in the life of that family. A few days later, she approached me during a gathering and shared with me things I cannot repeat. She described what was happening in her marriage.

I was both surprised and worried. What could I do to help her? With great faith I asked the Heart of Jesus to put into my mouth words of comfort. I recalled Fr. Dehon, who told us to leave the sacristy and go to the people! At that moment I understood that the people have a role and it is necessary to share that love with families.

In my life, I have had choices to make and I asked the Heart of Jesus to show me what were those which were in accord with his will. This happened when I was invited to live in a mission house. I was greatly attracted to this, because I have always loved the mission; however, while I was praying I realized this was not the time to say “yes” to this mission; I felt called to the apostolate of my family; my father had recently died and my mother needed my support. I have always felt the desire to serve in the foreign missions.

Nonetheless, I remain a member of the Dehonian Family and those works I am called to do; I spread the devotion of the Heart of Jesus in my community and in my family. We join in prayer every week before the images of the Heart of Jesus and the Immaculate Heart of Mary.

At present I am not a member of MDJ, but with my friends who have felt this same call, we have formed another group. Some of us are persons who have had a Dehonian experience, and other whom we have inspired to follow this ideal. Together, we continue to deepen our experience of faith and love of the Heart of Jesus. We continue to reach out to our parish and bring to others the love of the Heart of Jesus.

Fr. Dehon has taught me to not be indifferent to human suffering and the lack of knowledge of the Heart of Jesus. From him I have learned to be more sensitive and to be with those who suffers. I pray for them and give them my time.

(Ângela Aparecida Moreira, Taubaté-SP – Brasil)

D. Discussion Points

After the presentation of the theme, you can share your impressions of these points:

- The Lord’s Prayer is not only a beautiful prayer, but it is the model of all Christian prayer. Why is this?
- How did Fr. Dehon pray?
- Is the prayer of abandonment possible?
- How can a lay Dehonian practice Eucharistic Adoration?
- Is it possible for lay people to practice Lectio Divina? How can you do this?

E. A Moment of Prayer

Praying with the Bible – “Lectio Divina”

The second year of formation for lay Dehonians is dedicated to the deepening of the faith experience of Fr. Dehon. This is an experience of love, of God who loves me personally, and of his Son who gave his life for me on the cross. To cultivate this experience, Fr. Dehon had several special forms of prayer: Eucharist (both celebrated and adored), meditation, and the Word of God.

Here we propose Scriptural prayer (either communal or personal) based on a Biblical passage (Lk 11:1-13).

Prayer is a gift which transforms us internally. To pray is to feel an invisible presence and enter a dialogue with One who is our faithful companion throughout life. When our life becomes prayer, everything changes; we live in a new way. Once one has felt the power of prayer, one cannot ignore it; it becomes as natural as breathing.

Prayer is the encounter of my person with the person of God; a true encounter of persons. Prayer, therefore, is an immersion in the reality of God, living and present.

1. Invocation of the Holy Spirit

A moment of silence to gather ourselves in the presence of God and ask the light of the Spirit.

Let us pray.

God, who has put in the minds and hearts of humankind the gifts of thought and will, may the Spirit guide us to complete truth, that we may be true disciples of your Son, in whom you are well pleased. For he is Lord, living and reigning for ever and ever. Amen.

2. Word of God (Lk 11:1-13)

He was praying in a certain place, and when he had finished, one of his disciples said to him, “Lord, teach us to pray just as John taught his disciples.” He said to them, “When you pray, say:

*Father, hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come.
Give us each day our daily bread
and forgive us our sins
for we ourselves forgive everyone in debt to us,
and do not subject us to the final test.”*

And he said to them, “Suppose one of you has a friend to whom he goes at midnight and says, ‘Friend, lend me three loaves of bread, for a friend of mine has arrived at my house from a journey and I have nothing to offer him,’ and he says in reply from within, ‘Do not bother me; the door has already been locked and my children and I are already in bed. I cannot get up to give you anything.’ I tell you, if he does not get up to give him the loaves because of their friendship, he will get up to give him whatever he needs because of his persistence.

“And I tell you, ask and you will receive; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks, receives; and the one who seeks, finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened. What father among you would hand his son a snake when he asks for a fish? Or hand him a scorpion when he asks for an egg? If you then, who are wicked, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the Father in heaven give the holy Spirit* to those who ask him?”

3. Meditation

Take some time to study this text. Who is present? Who speaks? What do they say?

Some ideas to understand the text:

- Jesus is a man of prayer. He remains close to his Father so he may remain faithful to his call, to do the Father’s will.
- We are drawn by examples. The disciples also want to learn to pray.
- Jesus teaches, not fixed or magical formulas, but an attitude; he prays not to a distant, omnipotent God, but to a familiar, my Father and Our Father. Jesus honors God’s name, that God is holy.
- The Lord’s Prayer that we use in the liturgy is taken from the Gospel of Matthew (6,9-13). Luke’s version of the prayer is shorter.
- Everything is in the plural: give us, forgive us, free us. We are a community of children of God, not only isolated individuals. We pray as brothers and sisters and we are concerned for the needs of others.
- In a second example, Jesus tells the parable of the insistent friend, who needs immediate help. He is insistent, he repeats his petition until his friend understands and helps him.
- Jesus adds to this prayer an invitation to trust in God who always listens. Every sincere prayer is heard by God. Even if God does not give us exactly what we ask, he gives the best gift of all; the Holy Spirit. With the help of the Spirit, we can face any difficulty.

(It would be good to pause at this moment to re-read and listen to the Word, and let it penetrate our hearts.)

The facilitator could recall these points:

“True prayer is not in the voice, but in the heart. It is our desires, not our words, which give force to our prayer. If we speak only with the external voice, without desiring in our heart, our words are empty. However, even in silence, we ask from the fullness of our heart, our prayer will ring out.” (St. Augustine)

“Experience prayer; let the Spirit speak to your hearts. To pray means to give some of your time to Christ, to turn yourself over to him, listen in silence to the Word, let it echo in your heart.” (John Paul II).

4. Sharing

(When sharing Lectio in community, this is the time for sharing. Calmly, without haste, each one speaks what the Word has inspired, which has arisen in their heart. This is not a time to discuss the text, but to respond to the Word, to listen to what God communicates to us through each other)

5. Common prayer

(Now one can give words of praise, of thanksgiving, or intercession, as in the Eucharist, or spontaneously, giving time for each to share. Be brief. Listen to each other, and pray together with the prayers of each one)

6. Contemplation

(In shared Lectio, this has already been done previously)

7. Action

It is good to conclude the Lectio with some resolution to change an aspect of one's life in accord with what you have received in prayer. Or, one can choose a verse or text to repeat during the following day, or week.

8. Conclusion

Let us pray together Psalm 137

I thank you, Lord, with all my heart;
in the presence of the angels to you I sing.
I bow low toward your holy temple;
I praise your name for your mercy and faithfulness.

For you have exalted over all
your name and your promise.
On the day I cried out, you answered;
you strengthened my spirit.

All the kings of earth will praise you, Lord,
when they hear the words of your mouth.
They will sing of the ways of the Lord:
“How great is the glory of the Lord!”

The Lord is on high, but cares for the lowly
and knows the proud from afar.
Though I walk in the midst of dangers,
you guard my life when my enemies rage.

You stretch out your hand;
your right hand saves me.
The Lord is with me to the end.
Lord, your mercy endures forever.
Never forsake the work of your hands!

Literature

- *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, [numbers 2559-2865](#).
- *Catechism of the Catholic Church. Compendium*, [numbers 534-598](#).
- The General Audiences of Pope Benedict XVI on the prayer of the Old Testament, the prayer of Jesus and the prayer in the Acts of the Apostles, the Letters of Paul, and in the Apocalypse held between May 4, 2011 and September 12, 2012.

Meeting XIX

FR. DEHON AND THE ACT OF OBLATION

Objectives of the Meeting

- To deepen the sense of oblation in the experience of Fr. Dehon and his followers.
- To understand that in love – inasmuch as we are prophets of love – it is possible to grow in the offering of one’s life, with joy, to the Lord.
- To encourage the daily practice of the act of oblation not only as a prayer to be said, but as an ongoing attitude in the situations of everyday life, in the tasks and special mission of everyone, and in the challenges and difficulties of each day.

Outline of the Meeting: strategies and activities

The objective of this year was to remember and know the faith experience of Fr. Dehon. It is for this reason that right from the first meeting we were given the words “*Ecce Venio and oblation.*” Now we propose a synthesis that will enrich our theme so fundamental to dehonian spirituality and we underline the value which Fr. Dehon gave to the Eucharist as a gift of self to others and to us, as a frequent participation and celebration and as a continual mass, prolonged all through the day. The written testimony presented later could be presented first, at the beginning of the reflection. It would allow us to grasp better, by way of an example, how the spirituality of oblation can change the life of a person.

Development of the Meeting

A. Welcome

Make the usual greetings, invite to begin the meeting with a brief act of oblation, repeated three times:

“Here am I, O Father, I come to do your will.”

B. Reflection: *The Oblation of our Life*

1. A Text from the Bible (Heb 10:5-10, 12)

“When Christ came into the world, he said, “Sacrifices and offerings you have not desired, but a body you have prepared for me; in burnt offerings and sin offerings you have taken no pleasure. Then I said, ‘See, God, I have come to do your will, O God’ (in the scroll of the book it is written of me).” When he said above, ‘You have neither desired nor taken pleasure in sacrifices and offerings and burnt offerings and sin offerings’ (these are offered according to the law), then he added, ‘See, I have come to do your will.’ He abolishes the first in order to establish the second. And it is by God’s will that we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, ‘he sat down at the right hand of God’”

2. A Text from Fr. Dehon

“The two most noble motives which normally spiritual writers use to encourage the person to give himself to God are these: to dedicate oneself to what leads to perfection and to offer oneself with all that one has as a perpetual holocaust. These moves are excellent, but there is another which contains it and adds something more. This is to offer oneself to Our Lord in love by dedicating our life to love him and to make him love. In this way one imitates what can be imitated in oblation to our Lord.” (VAM 402)

“In true love one gives oneself fully to the beloved. There is no limit. One goes further and is happy to be at the disposal of the one loved. The union would be incomplete, would not really exist, if one would not allow one’s will to be absorbed by what one loves. Our Lord has welcomed the will of the Father, not with resignation, but with joy.” (VAM 252-253)

“Coming into the world he said: sacrifices and oblation I do not want (Heb 10:5). On entering the world, Jesus said, My Father did not want the offerings and sacrifices of the Old Law”: “What were these sacrifices and offerings? What were these that were pleasing to God and offered such satisfaction? They were heifers, lambs, pigeons, bread, wine, etc... These offerings did not have value in the eyes of God, there was nothing in them which represented the true victim, the true bread and the true wine, the true Lamb of God. “Corpus autem aptasti mihi”: he says: you have given me a body, a living body, alive in one spirit, worthy to be immolated in a holocaust. “Tunc dixi: ecce venio. Entering he said: Here am I”. “It is time that I fulfill the promise to sacrifice myself for you glory and the salvation of people: “*Venio ut faciam, Deus, voluntam tuam. Deus meus volui, et legem tuam in medio cordis mei* (Ps 39.9): I come to do your will as it is written in the depths of my heart.”

How great this act of self-gift of the Heart of Jesus! It encompasses acts more perfect than the highest virtues. It is an act of profound adoration, an infinite tribute given to the divine majesty, to the sovereign dominion of God. *Ecce venio!* It is an act of perfect love with which he dedicates his life to one who receives him. It is an act of reparation! I owe you the sacrifice of my life, he says to the Father. If I do not merit death, humans, my brothers, merited it. Am I not one of them? Did I not promise to sacrifice my life? Am I not bound by such an obligation? *Ecce venio. Here I am.*

It is a perfect act of obedience. Where to go? I am ready. *Ecce venio.* Must I go to Bethlehem, to Nazareth, in Egypt, in Galilee? *Ecce venio*” (CAM 2/62-63)

3. Theme for Reflection

3.1. The oblation of our life

Reparatory oblation is the main trait of dehonian spirituality. “Oblate” is one who gives himself without reservation to God to always do his will. The dehonian must be recognizable by his attachment to the self-gift of Christ to which he or she becomes united through attitudes of availability, abandonment, obedience, free gift of self, fraternal communion, solidarity. The word “oblation” comes from *oblatus* (offered) which is the past participle of the Latin verb *offerre* (to offer).

Before Christ, animals were offered to God. Once Jesus offered himself on the cross for us “as an offering and victim of sweet smell” (Eph 5:1-2), we are called, in union with his sacrifice (= offering), to offer “spiritual sacrifices pleasing to God” (1Pe 2:5). The Letter to the Romans invites

us “to give ourselves as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God; that is our spiritual worship” (Rom 12:1).

3.1.1. What is oblation?

The offering of Jesus is not to be reduced to his death on the cross. It has found expression in his whole life right from the beginning, when, according to the Letter to the Hebrews, coming into the world, he said, “Here am I, Lord, to do your will” (Heb 10:5-7). It was a constant attitude of obedience to the Father and of dedication to his brothers and sisters, from the beginning right up to his final breath. (Lk 23:46).

Oblation means to lose what belongs to you and giving it to another, to renounce the capacity to dispose of things in favor of an other. It is not to be in control of an other, of his or her life, activity, decisions and projects. It is to sow without seeing much by way of results (the Father and the owner of the field); it is not to expect gratification or recompense and to be attentive to the surprises of God. God not only loves us, but loves this world, these people, this church and its faithful; It also pushes us to hope also against all hope. Oblative /self-sacrificing love (or “pure love” as Fr. Dehon calls it) is appreciative, gratuitous, with conditions. Fr. Dehon connects the word of Christ “Here I come Lord”, with that of Mary: “Here I am, I am the servant of the Lord” (Lk 1:38). These are two essential expressions of dehonian spirituality.

3.1.2. How to respond to the love of God?

Our oblation is the response to the tender love of God in Christ. Jesus has given his life for us, because “there is no greater love than to give one’s life for one’s friends” (Jn 15:13). As a response, also we want to offer our heart and life to God our Father and to others, our brothers and sisters. St. Paul has said: “I live now in the faith of the Son of God, who has loved me and has given himself for me” (Gal 2:20). Love pays with love.

The handing over of one’s will to God is not a forced issue. When the will of God coincides with our will or chooses something which we find pleasing, everything is easy. However, it is in the trials of life where we find true oblation.

Resignation, as differing from acceptance, has a negative nuance because it refers to something irreparable. The oblation through love, in the style of Fr. Dehon, cannot be seen as a resignation but only with joy and trust.

The concept of oblation or oblation love is similar to the Gospel’s “serving” and “giving one’s life”, as the good shepherd gives his life for his sheep. To offer one’s life is a priestly attitude which in the final analysis is in the Eucharist with the body given and the blood poured out of Christ. Also we in our baptism are called to be a “priestly people” (Ac 1.6) with Jesus, imitating his example. Such an oblation and priestly spirit requires generosity. Fr. Dehon wanted for his congregation difficult missions where one dies young, poor and abandoned parishes, where one gives pastoral service to workers and to young people, where one is open to the media and to the new frontiers of evangelization, especially where the Church is absent and no man’s land.

3.1.3. What is Dehon’s continuous mass?

Christ did not wish to remain alone in his offering to the Father. He sought a worship which would extend into daily life, so that everything would change into an offering. Already in the Old Testament it is stated that “Obedience to God is worth more than sacrifices (of animals or things) and to be obedient to Him is better than the fat of animals” (1Sam 15:22)

At the heart of the teaching of Jesus is not the temple but the love of God and neighbor. In the New Testament, Christ is the only priest who offers the only true sacrifice to the Father, once for all, and he makes it present in the Eucharist with our participation. St. Peter teaches us that we are like living stones, “like a spiritual building, for a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God, by way of Jesus Christ” (1Pe 2:5). Vatican II as a consequence says to the laity: “All the works, the prayers and apostolic initiatives, family and conjugal life, daily work, the bodily and spiritual pleasures done in the Spirit, and also the difficulties of life undertaken in patience, can become sacrifices acceptable to God through Christ. And these things, in the Eucharistic celebration, are offered to the Father with the offering of the body of the Lord” (LG, 34).

3.1.4. The Eucharist Prayer helps us to grasp the meaning of this offering:

Eucharistic Prayer I: “Therefore, O Lord, as we celebrate the memorial of the blessed Passion, the Resurrection from the dead, and the glorious Ascension into heaven of Christ, your Son, our Lord, we, your servants and your holy people, offer to your glorious majesty, from the gifts that you have given us, this pure victim, this holy victim, this spotless victim, the holy Bread of eternal life and the Chalice of everlasting salvation.

Be pleased to look upon these offerings with a serene and kindly countenance, and to accept them, as you were pleased to accept the gifts of your servant Abel the just, the sacrifice of Abraham, our father in faith, and the offering of your high priest Melchizedek, a holy sacrifice, a spotless victim.

In humble prayer we ask you, almighty God: command that these gifts be borne by the hands of your holy Angel to your altar on high in the sight of your divine majesty, so that all of us who through this participation at the altar receive the most holy Body and Blood of your Son may be filled with every grace and heavenly blessing.”

Eucharistic Prayer II: “Celebrating the memorial of his Death and Resurrection, we offer you, Lord, the Bread of life and the Chalice of salvation, giving thanks that you have held us worthy to be in your presence and minister to you.”

Eucharistic Prayer III: “Therefore, O Lord, we celebrate the memorial of the saving Passion of your Son, his wondrous Resurrection and Ascension into heaven, and as we look forward to his second coming, we offer you in thanksgiving this holy and living sacrifice. Look, we pray, upon the oblation of your Church, and, recognizing the sacrificial Victim by whose death you willed to reconcile us to yourself, grant that we, who are nourished by the Body and Blood of your Son and filled with his Holy Spirit, may become one body, one spirit in Christ.”

Eucharistic Prayer IV: “Therefore, O Lord, as we now celebrate the memorial of our redemption, we remember Christ’s death and his descent to the realm of the dead; we proclaim his Resurrection and his Ascension to your right hand; and as we await his coming in glory, we offer you his Body and Blood, the sacrifice acceptable to you which brings salvation to the whole world. Look, O Lord, upon the Sacrifice which you yourself have provided for your Church”

Eucharistic Prayer V (Various needs): “Look with favor on the oblation of your Church, in which we show forth the paschal sacrifice of Christ that has been handed on to us, and grant that, by the

power of the Spirit of your love we may be counted now and until the day of eternity among the members of your Son in whose Body and Blood we have communion.”

In this way Fr. Dehon seeks a “continual” Mass during the day, also for those who cannot participate in the parish Mass, together with all the Masses celebrated in the world.

3.1.5. Spiritual sacrifices

Outside of the prayers of abandonment, contemplative prayer or intercessory prayer, prayer for Fr. Dehon was primarily a prayer of oblation. It is the daily, heartfelt and sincere offering of oneself for those who are so disposed. According to Fr. Dehon the most important thing for God is not the quantity or the weight of our work, but rather the YES that we give and the love which we put into all that we do. He also spoke of the importance of the little things of every day and has invited us to “practice in less common way the little things and offer them to God” (*Oeuvres spirituels* II, 236)

In the Mass what appears to have no value (a little bit of bread and wine) can become in our life and daily prayer something extraordinary. It is Christ who does this and presents it to the Father. He makes his own our secret tears, our efforts to goodness, our desires and even our failures. In Him and with Him and through Him they are offered to the Father.

All what is offered on the altar every day, even if one is not physically present at daily Mass, Jesus appreciates (“a cup of fresh water” offered to one who is thirsty will receive its recompense, says the Gospel) and is presented to the Father. Thanks to the hands of Jesus, everything acquires an immense value.

Our ministry and daily work acquire a spiritual fecundity; our sufferings united to those of Jesus are a purification and a salvation for many. The few loaves of bread and fish which we offer to Jesus are here multiplied

3.1.6. The existential dimension of oblation

In the Letter to the Hebrews which speaks of the priesthood of Christ one notes also an existential dimension to priestly oblation which Fr. Dehon much appreciated. It speaks of a constant availability to the service of one’s neighbors. The Letter says: “Let mutual love continue. Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it. Remember those who are in prison, as though you were in prison with them; those who are being tortured, as though you yourselves were being tortured. Let marriage be held in honour by all, and let the marriage bed be kept undefiled; for God will judge fornicators and adulterers. Keep your lives free from the love of money, and be content with what you have; for he has said, ‘I will never leave you or forsake you.’ Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God. (Heb 13:1-5, 16)

Oblation, therefore, is to place oneself at the disposition of the project of God, for the kingdom to which we are invited. This demands courage and determination. Archbishop Oscar Romero, before being killed at the altar, said, “I may be killed, but not the voice of God and justice.” God looks for prophets for his people, because he is not unfeeling to the cries of the poor and of those who are overcome by evil. We say: “Here am I, Lord, but why? And Jesus answers: “I have been sent to proclaim the good news to the poor, to set free the oppressed” (Lk 4:18). That is the mission for which one offers one’s life even to martyrdom.

As lay people we ought to remember that during Mass we are not only called to an encounter with Jesus, but also to offer our time and our life as missionaries of Christ in our surroundings.

3.1.7. The act of oblation

It is a very significant and expressive moment of this spirituality when in the morning one offers the day to God by way of an act of offering known as the “act of oblation”. It is an act of forgetting self to offer to God, without any calculations, our acts and our thoughts, our efforts and sufferings, the struggles for the kingdom, the service to our brothers and sisters. All this is done in union with the sacrifice of Jesus for the reparation of our sins and of all others, for the salvation of the world and in name of the Church.

It is important to renew this act made in the morning mentally several times during the day. The act ought to be inspired by love, the searching for and obedience to the will of God. This task, renewed each day and several times during the day, ought to become a permanent attachment to oblation, a state of oblation. By helping us to realize this, there have been created different formulae of the daily act of oblation. They are short biblical prayers, quite similar to the cries and prayers of the sick and the poor in the Gospel. This assures us that the act is easy to remember. Here are some examples:

- “Here am I, Lord, to do your will” (Heb 10:6-7)
- “Behold, I am the servant of the Lord” (Lk 1:38)
- “Lord, not my will but yours be done” (Lk 22:42)
- “Father, into your hands I commend my spirit” (Lk 23:46)
- “Lord, what do you want me to do?” (Heb 22:10)
- “Speak, Lord, your servants is listening” (1Sam 3:10)

These oblation declarations ought to lead to a commitment. By letting the Mass come alive, what is the great oblation of Christ and ours, we are invited not to “go in peace” silently to our homes, as many think, but to “be a bearer of the peace” of Christ (Lk 10:5-6) everywhere, also at the cost of refusal or persecution. By overcoming our fears, like the prophets and apostles we can say: “The Lord is with you.”

C. Dehonian Testimony

The example of Fr. Dehon has inspired and transformed the life of Fr. Daniel.

Fr. Daniel de Nascimento Lindo was born in Madeira (Portugal), on Christmas day of 1945 (what a beautiful birthdate!) and left with his family for Sao Paulo in Brazil at the age of seven. He entered into the Dehonian seminary in 1960 in the South Brazilian Province of the Congregation. After finishing his formation, he made his final vows in 1974. After his ordination he worked in the seminary, in a parish and in a retreat house.

He stood out for his dedication to young people and to people looking for spiritual growth and for a closer union with the heart of Christ. He worked for several years in the parish of Formiga MG and had proposed to several to enter into religious life. With several person he had begun a confraternity which today is part of the Dehonian Family.

Fr. Daniel died some years ago in a traffic accident in Jaragua do Sul where he was to give a spiritual retreat in his capacity as vice director of Casa P. Dehon in Brusque – SC (a retreat house).

The following testimony comes from a young consecrated woman, Nancy Brandão, co-founder of the “Fraternità Volto Santo e Maria del Silenzio (Confraternity of the Holy Face and Mary of Silence). Today the confraternity has 25 members.

“Fr. Daniel was young, happy, full of life. In his commitment he sought to put into practice what he had learned. He took seriously the teaching of Fr. Dehon. Passionately in love with the Heart of Jesus, he lost no opportunity to invite young people, children and adults to seek refuge in Him.

As Fr. Dehon he:

- loved young people, played soccer with them, joined them in their feasts but also in excursions and fishing.
- celebrated Mass without haste, with great attentiveness. His Masses were fully participatory, joyful, full of love. He was present before the Eucharist the whole night.
- strove to do the will of the Father, was always available to help others, again without any haste.
- loved everyone, had great trust in people, helped the rich and the poor, the suffering and couples. .
- when slandered or persecuted, forgave all, in the spirit of love and reparation.
- in missionary spirit, sacrificed his holidays, organized meetings and retreats for young people, lay people and religious in different cities and regions.
- encouraged us to live the spirit of abandonment and oblation: to pray, to sacrifice for others, especially for priests and consecrated persons.
- sought to know the will of God every day.
- made the vow of victimhood.

One day, about to go to another city to preach a retreat, he was involved in an accident which took his life. He had a final meeting with the One he sought. Having known Fr. Daniel, we have the certainty that Fr. Dehon, the spiritual master, can encourage and guide the search for unity with the heart of the Lord and for the construction of a civilization of love. It is possible to live with courage the motto of Fr. Dehon: “Here am I, Lord, I have come to do your will” (Heb 10.7).

Let us recall some words left us by Father Daniel a few months before his death: “I come to seek the grace to become bread for you. Bread is not offered unless it can be multiplied. I feel that I want to be multiplied. I wish to give myself. I give myself interiorly to you. I seek to transform myself into good bread that is tasty, healthy and nutritious. I give myself to you. Do with me what you will. Multiply me, O Lord!”

“I am a sheep that at every moment can be sacrificed by the Shepherd. What I want is to do the will of the Lord every moment. In all things, may I be moved by love.” (Notes taken during an Ignatian retreat in July 1986).

D. Discussion Points

In small groups,

a) share about the personal practice of oblation. What does it mean for every one? Share about an experience in which the act of oblation was not only an act of prayer, but a sharing of the practice of oblation. Share a personal experience in which the act of oblation was not just an act of prayer but a lived oblation, a commitment.

b) try to write an act of oblation, considering this structure:

- can be turned to God or to Jesus
- consist of at least three paragraphs:
 - *one of praise to God,*
 - *another of sacrifice – oblation,*
 - *another to seek the help of God to live what one has offered.*

(one of these could become the Act of Oblation of the group)

E. A Moment of Prayer

Oblation and the glory of the resurrection

1. Initial Greeting

In the name of the Father...

(A moment of silence to welcome the presence of God)

2. Hymn (one's choice)

3. Prayer

We thank you Father for the glorious and eternal resurrection of your Son, our Master and Shepherd. Give us the strength of your Spirit because, by breaking the bonds of egoism in us and the world, with him we give you the service of praise and the oblation of our love, participating in the construction of a fraternal world of solidarity, a sign of the reign of your Heart. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

4. Word of God (Jn 20:19-20)

Pope Francis invites us to the joy of the Gospel. The basis of this faith and of Christian joy is the resurrection of Jesus. It was a consequence of his faithful oblation of his “ecce venio” (the incarnation) up to “into your hands I hand over my spirit” (death on the cross). Between the two events there occurred an unique story of the voluntary, faithful and total oblation of Jesus. For this reason the Father exalted him and gave him the name of Lord (see Phil 2:5-11). Of this oblation there remained on the glorified body the wounds which Jesus showed his disciples:

“When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, ‘Peace be with you.’ After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. (Jn 20:19-20)

The disciples rejoiced, except for Thomas who was not present and who need to touch the pierced side in order to allow him to recognize Jesus: “My Lord and my God!”

Fr. Dehon comments: “Jesus hastened to show the opening of his side in the first apparition. We rejoice with the apostles. We bless the Providence that allowed their doubts and their slowness to believe. They touched his wounds. They ate with him. Their incredulity helps our faith”. (ASC 3/482.484 [Friday within the Octave of Easter])

We recognize also the hardness of our heart. We cancel our incredulity with humility and penance. We make reparation by faith and works. Let us devote ourselves to evangelization. Let us divulge love for the Heart of Jesus and the spirit of reparation.” (ASC 3/506 [Sunday after Easter])

5. Remembering some key words of today’s reflection

(read slowly, allowing a bit of time after each word so that one can feel the word again)

- “Here am I, I am the servant of the Lord” (Lk 1:38)
- “I did not come to do my will but yours” (Lk 22:42)
- “He loved me and gave himself for me” (Gal 2:20)
- “In true love, one gives oneself totally to the beloved” (Fr. Dehon).
- Oblation means to give up ownership of something and to give it to the Other.
- “I come to seek the grace to become bread for you. Bread is not offered unless it can be multiplied. I feel that I want to be multiplied. Multiply me, O Lord!” (Fr. Daniel)

6. Intercessions

We present to the Lord our prayer, seeking the grace to offer our life with joy for the kingdom of his Heart. We say together:

R. Remain with us and give us the joy of offering our life for the kingdom.

1. Lord Jesus, by the merits of your incarnation, death and resurrection make us always available to welcome your Spirit and to fulfill the will of the Father. We pray to the Lord.
2. My Lord and my God, give me the capacity to give with my life and my work an answer of love to the love you have for us. We pray to the Lord.
3. Christ Jesus who lived in communion with the Father and people, help us to create communion with our family, our work, in the community and the Church. We pray to the Lord.
4. Master and Shepherd, make us authentic cooperators of your work of redemption in the world by participating in the evangelizing mission of the Church. We pray to the Lord.
5. ...

Our Father...

7. Act of Oblation

We sing your resurrection, Lord Jesus, victorious over death, which communicates to the world the joy of life. You live in the glory of the Father and continue to offer your blood for us, a gift of love eternally pleasing. To your paschal oblation we unite our own in order to live the new life that you have gained. Teach us to believe in the fruitful mystery of the seed that dies to give life. Eternal Priest who returns to God a humanity that became distant from you, draw all humanity to yourself, make them victorious over all forms of death and lead them to God on the road of peace. Amen.

Literature

Meeting XX

FR. DEHON AND THE SOCIAL DIMENSION

Objectives of the Meeting

- Introduce an understanding of the social dimension in Fr. Dehon, putting it into effect and his sources of inspiration;
- Get to know a little bit about the time of Fr. Dehon and its social problems in Saint Quentin;
- Awaken a social sensitivity for today: the impact of the social doctrine of the Church and the need to updating it by transforming the surroundings, the world, in view of the Reign of the heart of Jesus;
- Learn to pay attention to the social problems by going to their sources, learning how to act on them, to work together to transform society and proclaim another possible world that is more just and acts with greater solidarity than the present one.

Outline of the Meeting: strategies and activities

We wish to present the social activity of Fr. Dehon and the spiritual motivation of his involvement and that of the Congregation. We will search out first the motives that brought Fr. Dehon to his social apostolate and we shall see how he realized them in his life both in his writings and in his social works. Then we will undertake a reflection and we will seek to draw some conclusions for Dehonian Christian life today. We will also give some indications how we might get involved socially.

Development of the Meeting

A. Welcome

Distribute among the participants a newspaper report or a copy of a web page which describe the situations of poverty, hunger, unemployment, political corruption, violence, reports on persons or other situations which demonstrate social injustice and the lack of respect for human dignity. Among the reports place some photos of Fr Dehon and a text / document of the social teaching of the Church.

As an alternative to the reports one can make a power point presentation or a projection of images of a situation of social vulnerability, or, from another angle, of works, initiatives and/or groups who work for the poor. Elicit a moment of sharing among the participants in order to introduce the theme of the day.

B. Reflection: *Fr. Dehon and the Social Dimension*

1. A Text from the Bible (Mt 25:31-40)

“When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, and he will put the sheep at his right hand and the goats at the left. Then the king will say to those at his right hand, “Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I

was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.” Then the righteous will answer him, “Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?” And the king will answer them, “Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.”

2. A Text from Fr. Dehon

This text was written in 1916, when Fr. Dehon was 73 years old.

“I let pass in my memory my whole participation in Christian social action. It was a vocation, a providential mission. In Rome I had often let my reading be directed by this interest. I enjoyed reading De Maistre, De Bonald, Blanc de Saint Bonnet, the policy of Bossuet, the thesis of Bellarmine on the relationship between Church and State. Of 1872 I recall the fund patronage; then the Circle, the Association of Christian Employers Christians, the social studies reunions.

I promote the beautiful Congresses: at Notre Dame de Liesse in 1875; San Quentin, in 1876; Soissons, in 1878. I followed the meetings of the workers’ associations chaired by Albert de Mun. For several years, we held diocesan meetings of social studies in Soissons, in San Quentin, Laon. From these came the “Christian Social Manual” which got a great response and sold over 10,000 copies. In 1893, there were the diocesan meetings at Liesse. For ten years, we held the annual study meetings in Val-des-Bois, which I often chaired. (...) In 1896, the meeting was in San Quentin. In 1896, a labor congress was held in Reims, the National Congress and meetings for clergy. There were also meetings in Benoit-Vaux, Rodez. The Democratic Congress in Lyon.

In 1897, 1898, 1899, there were the conferences in Rome, honored by the presence of several cardinals and encouraged by Leo XIII, whose echo I am. I published these public conferences in several volumes: Social Catechism - Social Renewal - Pontifical Directives. Several of these books have been translated into Italian, Arabic, Hungarian, Portuguese. They become classics in many seminaries in Italy and France. I promoted in Rome meetings of social studies in which eminent men, such as Fr. Wernz, Fr. Janssen took part. In 1897 again, I gave conferences in Mende, Allais and Nimes. In 1900, there were the Congress in Cahors – the Franciscan Congress in Rome - the Congress of Brugges.

The practical walked hand in hand with the theoretical. The works at San Quentin continued. They were imitated in the suburban parishes by priests whom I had instructed. In this social activity not everything was perfect. The social reforms were frantic and wordy. As for me, I was too Roman because I was afraid of losing my way. (...) In this apostolate, I sought nothing else than the promotion of the little ones and the humble in the spirit of the Gospel.” (NQT 39/119-125 [1916 Social Action]).

3. Theme for Reflection

3.1. Father Dehon and the Social Apostolate

The reality of today’s world and the mission of the Church asks us Dehonians and all Christians to awaken and rediscover the interest and the task of the Church for the poor and the excluded from

the benefits of social progress. “Just as Christ has completed his work of redemption for the poor and the persecuted, so also the Church is called to take the same road to communicate to all the fruits of salvation. (...) Christ was sent from the Father “to give the good news to the poor, to heal the brokenhearted” (Lk 4:18), to “seek and save those who were lost” (Lk 19:10): so also the Church surrounds with love all who are afflicted by human misery and recognizes in the poor and the suffering the image of her poor and suffering Founder, and will relieve their needs and in them seek to serve Christ” (LG, 8).

3.2. The experience of God, the foundation of social work

The dehonian charism has its origin in the experience of faith of Fr. Dehon (cf. Constitutions SCJ 2). It was an experience of the mystery of God’s love revealed in Christ the savior. In the contemplation of the pierced side of Christ, Fr. Dehon had found the love of the Father in his own life and in the lives of his brothers and sisters.

Our Founder saw this experience of the pierced side not only in his personal life but especially in the difficult context of the workers’ world, in the suffering and injustice of his time. It was the bitter experience of absence - the absence of love, justice and brotherhood – which has had a great influence on the life and work of Fr. Dehon and it left deep marks in his life.

For him it was a contrast experience. He could not possibly agree with this state of affairs. It is necessary to change it. It committed him to the “constitution of the Reign of the Heart of Jesus in souls and societies” because redemption is possible and offered freely to all (cf. Constitutions SCJ 4, 12)

This experience was at the root of all his social work. The experience of the merciful love of God, together with the deep awareness of the reality of his time, gave direction to his pastoral options, especially for the poor and the marginalized, for the workers and the poor.

3.3. Beginning in Saint-Quentin

After the completion of his Roman studies, Fr. Dehon received from the bishop his first assignment: to work in Saint Quentin, a complex and challenging parish, with seven other priests. He assumed his mission full of zeal and enthusiasm. In the measure in which he had come to know the great needs of this industrial city he felt touched by its degrading social context. Guided by his apostolic zeal, he threw himself into the world of the workers: the apprentices, workers, and young people and their educational, work and housing situations.

From the beginning he looked for an equitable solution to the social question with initiatives and works, with words and writings, not only locally but also at the diocesan level and elsewhere. He sought to help in the formation of priests in their pastoral engagements and of seminarians by teaching them about the social question. He encouraged the priests to get out of their sacristies and to go to the people. He said that it was necessary to visit the families and to create a popular paper. In study circles he connected with his parishioners; he gave numerous conferences and retreats. He assisted in the associations of religious and professional, in particular, unions and corporations. He did not work alone but sought the collaboration of many laity.

He worked with laity in their various forms of associations, especially with those of the St. Vincent de Paul societies and the Third Order of St. Francis. He founded Associations of Reparation. He worked with workers and work givers, with youth and educators, with the rich and the poor, with

the political powers of his time and the resources of the available media. He wrote articles, books, founded a newspaper and a magazine.

He organized and participated in different forms of reflections: conferences, study circles, weeks of study and social gatherings. He wanted to sensitize the clergy and laity to a new way of being church in this time of industrial revolution and profound changes in the way of working and living. He had the intention to form persons in view of a more Christian society, a society that was more just and supportive. In this he invested a great amount of energy by way of education and social and pastoral reflection.

3.4. Leaving the sacristies

The speeches of Fr. Dehon became alive when in social congresses, speaking to seminarians and priests, he proclaimed the urgency of going to the people (MSO 256-259; 346-368) or when he gave the Roman Conferences (1897 – 1900) when he was already better known and could reach a significant audience.

In all this, Fr. Dehon spoke time and again of the necessity for action:

- “Evil is immense. The remedy is in our hands. What we do is not enough. We may not be content only distributing the sacraments to those who seek the. The people withdraw from a church which is not interested in their rights and see in priest only the accomplices of the oppressors.” (RSO 5/8)
- “Let us study. Let us organize ourselves. We must make know the truth. The social power today is in the hands of the people. It is necessary to go to these people so that they can become conscious of their power and their future.” (RSO 2/88)
- “Let us go to enlighten, instruct and love people. Let us go to people with a precise program, with truly popular works, with incessant activity. Let us go to the people with a true social science and with works. Let us show true remedies to social evils. Let us love the people, let us defend them and they will love us and defend us. It is necessary to infuse the spirit of justice and love in the little ones of social life.” (RSO 4/11; 5/8)
- In the 5th conference, Léon Dehon insisted “It is necessary that the church and the people come together. Priests and men of action, continue! It is necessary that the people understand that you do not act only tactically, but with conviction. You must always be grounded in the principles of the Gospel.” (RSO 5/135)
- In the 7th Conference he said that one ought to go to the people with the program of Christian Democracy: “Its basis and its content come, with some variations and details, directly from the encyclical of Leo XIII (Rerum Novarum). With such a program we must go to the people and the gain them for Christ.” (RSO 7/76)
- “Priests cannot remain closed in their churches and canons. It is necessary that the priests leave the sacristy and mix with the people and serve them” (RSO 8/50-51)

3. 5. The social works of Fr. Dehon

Right from the first months of his presence in Saint-Quentin, Fr. Dehon showed himself to be a man of initiatives. At the end of his life, someone commented that in reality nothing happened in this city during the 30 years that he lived there without his participation. Here is a list of the main works of Fr. Dehon and his first collaborators.

a) At the beginning of his ministry: Between 1871-1878

Fr. Dehon is in Saint Quentin where he is the seventh assistant in the parish. The condition of the people (poverty, exhausting work, hunger wages) led Fr. Dehon to look for “a just solution to the social question” with initiatives and activities, in word and in writings. We can remember the important works such as the Patronage of Saint Joseph, the workers circles, social congresses, meetings with work givers, the formation of priests and seminarians, many publications and the College Saint Jean. He developed at the same time a social action with the work givers and the workers. At first, Fr. Dehon was convinced that the industrialists ought to undertake social action in favor of workers. The latter did not have the capacity to look after their own general interests.

- **The Patronage of Saint Joseph:** Fr. Dehon arrived at the parish at the end of 1871. Already in the month of March of the next year he began the planning of these works. By June 23, 1872 he had turned to young workers in order to fill their free time with educational activities. At first he met the young people on Sunday afternoon. A short time later he began to welcome some of them who did not have a place to live and also began some activities with graduating students. He wanted to prepare a new generation of leaders who could transform the society of the future. At first Fr. Dehon did this work. Later it was taken over by Fr. Rasset.
- **The College Saint Jean (1877/08/15):** Fr. Dehon thought of this school as a social work. In his *Manuel Sociale* (MSO 617-646: Part 2, Chapter 17) he writes: “A priest who is busy with the care of souls will have as his first preoccupation to have a private school if Providence gives him the necessary resources.” (MSO 617) His “Saint Jean” was the most important work of this time. It still exists today but now run by the diocese. At the website of the Collège (www.st-jean02.org) one can read: “Although founded in 1877, the spirit which existed at the creation of the Collège has remained the same: to educate young people in the desire to forge their character at the service and respect of human dignity. (...) More than ever, the works and the institutions of Fr. Léon Dehon remain actual in a world without clear reference points.”

b) Emergency of the transformation of the society: 1878 a 1888

Dehon always begins to notice more than not to have enough the charity. There is a need to get involved in the questions of social justice and make a programme of the restructuring of the society. He engages the congregation in different activities.

- **The work of the deaf and dumb at Soissons.** In the first days of October 1879, at the request of the bishop of Soissons, he sends the first confreres Lamour, Falleur and Philippot to assume the institution of the deaf and dumb (St. Medard). They have guided this work for a couple of years; afterwards they have returned it to the diocese.
- **The diocesan missions.** These missions were taken in the lent season of 1886 for the first time. Many religious have realized through these missions an excellent work. Besides these, the other fathers who had collaborated with these missions were Frs. Charcosset, Rasset, Essous and Delgoffe.
- **The “maitrise” of St. Quentin basilica.** It was a small school connected to St. Quentin basilica, in which there lived some fifty children. It was in the hands of the congregation from 1886. The education was free but the children were to help in the liturgical services, as altar boys and singers. They were chosen from the poor families, they had to be intelligent and pious and, if possible, aspirants to priesthood. This work was abandoned in 1897.
- **The parish of St. Eligius (St. Éloi),** in the outskirts of St. Quentin, with the inhabitants around 10,000, was affiliated to the congregation in 1887.

- **Val-des-Bois.** In 1887, Fr. Charcosset begins to work at Val-des-Bois, in the fabrics of Léon Harmel, together with another priest and a scholastic. Fr. Charcosset, before entering into the congregation, had already worked at Charoles; he had founded some social works, a circle of workers, and some patronages for the boys and girls. Now, working at Val-des-Bois, he begins to study the social questions and write a series of articles with an objective to motivate the priests to be interested in the social causes. Still, in 1887 he participates with Léon Harmel in a great pilgrimage of the catholic workers to Rome, with the participation of 3,000 persons.
- **The parish of St. Martin (1888).** It was a very populated area and practically abandoned at the outskirts of St. Quentin. Fr. Augustine Herr was in charge to start the works in the place where even today there is a Dehonian community, who is engaged with the parish.

c) In line with the Pope: Between 1889-1892

Some initiatives of this period: with the idea of creating good publicity in 1889 he began editing the review “The Reign of the Heart of Jesus”. He participated in meetings and congresses of workers. He noted the openings to social and political change. After the publication of *Rerum Novarum* (Leo XIII, May 15, 1891) he took the mission to be the portparole of the Pope: “The pope has spoken. Now it is time for us to be his spokesperson. We are his echo. Listen to the pope. He wishes that his priests go to the people. And it is among the people that we must be. There will be no change if we do not know the sentiments of the people” (NHV 15/97-98). In that spirit he assumes new works:

- **The mission in Ecuador** (1888-1896). In the course of these years, 18 religious of the Congregation parted for the mission in Ecuador. The first ones were Fr. Blanc and Grison.
- **Sanctuary of Our Lord of Fresneau** in Marsanne, the diocese of Valence, in the south of France (1890).
- **The parish of Oulchy**, in the diocese of Soissons (1891). This was a totally materialistic region with many difficulties. Destined for this parish were the priests Rasset, Waguet and Noiret.

d) Change of political vision: Between 1893-1900

Fr. Dehon is the president of the Commission of Social Studies in the diocese of Soissons (28/06/1893). His main activities:

- To seek to create more modern activities to satisfy the needs of the time, without neglecting the old.
- Political participation (Christian Democracy). The political commitment. He defends the necessity to create a Catholic political party.
- He insists on the fact that one must go to the people simply to gain them for Christ.
- He publishes the *Manuel social* (1894/08/20). It is a collective work, directed by Fr. Dehon, but written by different persons. It reflects not only the thoughts of Fr. Dehon, but much more. It spreads the social teaching of the Church of the time. Fr. Dehon still defends the social congresses.
- He insists that clergy listen to the appeal of Leo XIII especially regarding the desire of the Pope to have priests go to the people.
- He promotes the social studies among the clergy.
- In 1897 he begins the Roman Conference (on social renewal)
- He sends missionaries to northern Brazil (1893). He works and begins at Camaragibe-PE, in the factories of signor Meneses who wanted our priests to develop a work similar to that of Val-des-Bois.

Worthy of note is the **change of political vision** of Fr. Dehon. Initially he was a monarchist as the greater part of the catholic population and the members of his family. However, he took note that the democratic system would offer better conditions for the participation of the citizens and a better social development. He began to promote a Christian Democracy based on the principles of catholic social doctrine.

In this time he took also another important initiative with the congregation:

- **The mission in the Congo (1897).** This is the great mission of the Congregation. Fathers Grison and Lux, expelled from Ecuador, were the first to leave for the Congo. Fr. Gabriel Lux returned and in 1903 he left for Brazil.
- **The mission to Tunis (1898).**
- **The mission to southern Brazil** began in 1903 with the mandate to accompany pastorally the recent European immigrants and their descendants. Moreover at this time there was the foundation of at least eleven houses of formation in different parts of Europe.
- In 1919 Fr. Dehon reflected once again on these commitments and wrote in the Spiritual Directory: “In our apostolic works we ought to give preference to those that can be considered the most important and loved by the Heart of Jesus: the ministry to priests, their formation, their sanctification; the care of children, workers and the poor. Let us serve our Lord more directly, always dedicated to those of whom Jesus said: “*Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.* (Mt 25:40) (DSP 356)

3.6. From Fr. Dehon to our time

- a) Fr. Dehon not only shared with religious his preoccupation on the social question, but also **involved the laity** on this issue. He thought that all Christians ought to seek charity and justice. He gave great attention to the Third Order of St. Francis (lay people, men and women who follow the spirituality of St. Francis) and had in mind that one day something like this ought to be connected with his charism, beginning with the Association of Reparation.
- b) The **Social Doctrine of the Church** did not begin with Leo XIII; many of its elements were already in place much earlier. The first keys, of course, are found already in the Gospel. Throughout the centuries, Christians knew these orientations and defended the rights of the poor on the basis of the Word of God. However, with Leo XIII a new phase began of systematizing this doctrine or social thought. It has continued uninterrupted up to our time. All the popes (with the exception of John Paul I) published new directives in answer to the social needs of each time. Also many Episcopal conferences made significant contributions to the evolution on the social thought of the church in response to critical situations within their countries.
- c) For his time Fr. Dehon published the **Social Manual**. In 2004 the Pontifical Council of Justice and Peace published the **Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church** which combined in one volume the principles, criteria for judgment and practical orientations from Leo XIII to John Paul II. It is the most complete work of its kind to study the principles contained in the Social Doctrine from *Rerum Novarum* to *Centessimus Annus* (John Paul II, 1991). It is **rich index and analysis** which permits one to find the many themes found in these texts in the last hundred years. Also the *Evangelii Gaudium* of Pope Francis has an interesting chapter, chapter IV, on current social themes. Pope Francis also wrote *Laudato Si'*, a first papal encyclical on the environment.

- d) Episcopal conferences and dioceses have orientations and directives for **social pastoral initiatives** at the local and national level. Many parishes, religious congregations and civil organizations have developed interesting activities of solidarity with the poor, of human promotion and social and political sensitivities for the community.

3.7. *Where do I see myself?*

- a) Every dehonian, religious or lay, is invited to **deepen his or her knowledge** of the orientations of the church in the social field, to know how to be present in the light of the Gospel in social conflicts and situations of injustice or violence affecting the human dignity of any citizen.
- b) He or she should know also the social challenges that persist in our time, manifesting themselves in **ancient and new forms of poverty**. It is impressive to observe how in each epoch there arise new forms of exclusion and injustice, the fruit of human egoism, and resistant to the values of the Gospel. If in the time of Fr. Dehon the social question was very serious, today there exist other very grave situations, dealing with immigrants, political refugees, the victims of war, the trafficking of drugs, the new forms of human slavery, sexual abuse, alongside the old forms such as hunger, the lack of access to education and to the resources of health and so on.
- c) On the other side, there are also so many **new resources**. We can participate in initiatives for the poor and the social causes within the community, parish or diocese. We can accompany and support organizations such as Caritas, AVAAZ, Vivat International (see its site: www.vivatinternational.org), and others. All ought to know the **objectives of sustainable development**, of the United Nations (2015-2030) and support them.
- d) We do well to participate in the various forms of pastoral social work or in community movements giving part of our time to volunteer work. Every Christian and particularly a disciple of Fr. Dehon, ought to feel committed to Jesus who “though rich made himself poor” (2Cor 8:9), who came so that all may have life (Jn 10:10), who has a heart of compassion (Mt 9:26), who defended the life of the adulterous woman (Jn 8:7), who gave us as an example the commitment of the good Samaritan (Lk 10:37), who went out to meet the lepers (Luke 5.13; 17:14), who welcomed the widow and children (Lk 7:13; 12:38; Mk 10:24) and who saw himself in every little person whom we find on our way (Mt 25:40).

C. Dehonian Testimony

“My story as a member of the Dehonian Family began before I was even born. My family lived in Luminarias, a small village 42 km from Lavras.

In the 50s and 60s the dehonians were for some time responsible for the parish of the city. Among them there was Fr. Silvestre Müller, who had become great friends with my grandmother and the whole family. In the beginning of the 1980s, when I was six, we moved to Lavras. We went to the parish of Sant’Ana and became reacquainted with Fr. Silvester, who had done so much for the Luminarias. He was always there for the catechism classes, always joking, teaching, speaking about the love the heart of Jesus.

While growing up, I continued to deepen in my soul the love of Jesus, knowing his meek and humble heart. In the parish I knew the dehonians and I learned to love the heart of Christ, the SCJ congregation and the parishioners. In 1998 Fr. Carlos Martinenghi, who was the parish priest then,

invited me to participate in the group of Lay Dehonians. There existed then a group of young people who lived the dehonian spirituality and participated in their missionary activities.

I let Fr. Silvester, my director, know of the invitation. He encouraged me to accept the invitation. He said: "Go and spread the love of the Heart of Jesus wherever you are." It became the best thing I did in that year. With the lay dehonians I began my journey within the dehonian spirituality. I learned to look at the world with new eyes, particularly regarding inequality and poverty, the political and social sphere and the need to go to the people.

At the time I had already finished my humanities, but I decided to continue these studies with a view of following the course in civil law, just as Fr. Dehon had done. As usual, I went to my friend and spiritual director, Fr. Silvester, to find counsel. He again encouraged me: "Yes, go, take the course. Don't be afraid. Be inspired by Fr. Dehon and you will be able to do much to help and change the world."

Today, after some years, I see how much this has made me grow. I seek to put into practice in my profession the ideals of Fr. Dehon. It is not easy, but I try. I strengthen myself with daily prayer, the union with the Heart of Jesus and the commitment to not be conformed with an unjust world. The Eucharist and the act of oblation help me not to be afraid. My reparation is to help to create a more just world, supportive and equal. I can do this with my profession through my participation in the community and my family.

I thank God always for being allowed to be part of this beautiful Dehonian Family in which I find the strength to struggle, to deepen my faith and the acquire more trust in being human."

(Jerusa Helena Furtado Rodrigues, Lavras-MG, Brasile)

D. Discussion Points

(in groups, choose one or two questions for each group or have each group respond to one or two of the following questions)

1. What was the origin and what sustained Fr. Dehon in his social work?
2. Can the social work of Fr. Dehon at Saint Quentin and the works of the first period still inspire our social commitments today?
3. What can we say to those who want to construct a new world while forgetting the Creator and the save the world without the Savior?
4. How do we respond today to the call of Fr. Dehon: "Let us study, organize and go to the people"?
5. What would we be willing to do for the Heart of Jesus, for our people and for our Church wherever to live and exercise our apostolate?
6. What do the thinking and social work of Fr. Dehon suggest to us today? How can we spread his social thinking? What can we do today in our community?

(Share and integrate the answers of the groups)

E. A Moment of Prayer

1. Hymn *(to be chosen in accordance with local culture)*

2. Prayer *(together or in two groups)*

Father of mercy, we give you thanks
for having invited your Son, Emmanuel, God-with-us.

With Jesus we are called to stand in the midst of your people.
We are ready to welcome you Spirit who sends us into the world
as missionaries of justice and mercy.

Make us faithful in our following of Christ,
in his love for you and for our brothers and sisters
and in his way of being present to humanity.

Holy Father,
your heart listens to the clamor of your people.

In Christ Jesus you have visited us
and liberated us in a wonderful way.

Give us the grace to meet the most poor and needy,
those who lack bread and hope.

Thus committed, and thus inserted into the midst of people
with a love without reservation,
may we be signs of the new humanity in Jesus Christ.
Amen.

3. Word of God *(recall some words from scripture)*

- “As he went ashore, he saw a great crowd; and he had compassion for them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd” (Mk 6:34); “but he answered them, “You give them something to eat.” (Mk 6:37)
- “Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.” (Mt 25:40)
- *(Other texts...)*

(a moment of silence to let the words become your own)

4. Intercessions

Spontaneous intercessions to be concluded with the Our Father...

5. Act of Oblation

- Leo Dehon, *Christian Social Renewal*, Conferences V ([The Social Mission of the Church](#)) & VIII ([The social role of the Church and of the Priest](#)).
- Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* (2004), chapter II ([The Church's Mission and Social Doctrine](#) [numbers 60-104]), chapter IV ([Principles of the Church's social doctrine](#) [nn. 160-208]).
- Pope Francis, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* (2013), chapter IV ([The Social Dimension of Evangelization](#), especially the section IV, [Social dialogue as a contribution to peace](#) [number 238-258]).
- Avelino Diez, *Pensamiento social del Padre Dehon*.
- Driedonkx, Egidio, *The Social Apostolate of Father Dehon*.
- Giuseppe Manzoni, *Leo Dehon and his Message*
- Andrea Tessarolo, “Il Padre Leone Dehon, animatore del movimento sociale cristiano”, Roma, 2004.

FINAL CELEBRATION AND HANDING OVER OF AN ICON OF JESUS CHRIST

Hymn

1. The experience of Fr. Dehon and our experience

1.1. Introduction

In this final meeting of prayer, we want to appropriate all that we have reflected on in this whole year. Let us take a lead from part of the Letter to Galatians, where Paul speaks of his experience of faith, which was also that of Fr. Dehon and which should be ours as well. For the Apostle, the presence - the life – of transcendence in us comes from the presence, the irruption of God, in man. It is an initiative, a completely free gift of God, in Jesus Christ, that Paul called “grace”. Let us listen!

1.2. A Biblical Reading

Gal 2:19b-20

A Reading from the Letter of Saint Paul to the Galatians

Brothers and Sisters, I have been crucified with Christ and it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me; the life I now live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God who has loved me and given himself for me.

The Word of God.

All: Thanks be to God.

1.3. A Text from Fr. Dehon

CAM 1/269

A Reading from the Spiritual Writings of Venerable Fr. Leo Dehon

Love which the Son of God has made to come upon the Earth has never left it. Saint Paul has said “He has loved me and has given himself up for me” (Gal 2:20). His love has led Him to Bethlehem, to Nazareth and to Calvary. He has loved me and he has given his body and his blood in the Eucharist; he has given me his sacraments and his grace. It is the same love that has opened his Heart and that still reveals him to us today.

Let us spend some moments of silence and think about all that we have heard so far. In silence, we can repeat one or another word that we have heard, for example: “Christ has loved me and has given Himself for me” or “It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me” (Gal 2:20).

1.4. Responsorial Psalm

Ps 89 (88)

Let us sing of the mercies of the Lord revealed in Christ who, loving, has given himself for us.

Refrain: I will sing forever of the love of the Lord.

or: Misericordias Domini in aeternum cantabo (Taizé)

I have made a covenant with my chosen one;
I have sworn to David my servant:
I will make your dynasty stand forever
and establish your throne through all ages.

Blessed the people who know the war cry,
who walk in the radiance of your face, Lord.
In your name they sing joyfully all the day;
they rejoice in your righteousness.

He shall cry to me, "You are my father,
my God, the Rock of my salvation!"
Forever I will maintain my mercy for him;
my covenant with him stands firm.

1.5. Prayer

(St. Ephrem, + 379)

(Let us pray in two parts)

1. I fall at your feet, O Lord, to adore you;
I give you thanks, God of goodness,
I plead before you, God of Holiness.
I bend my knees before you.

2. I fall at your feet, O Lord, to adore you;
I give you thanks, God of goodness,
I plead before you, God of Holiness.
I bend my knees before you.

1. You willed to suffer the death for me, a sinner,
the death of the cross.
And you have delivered me from the clutches of evil.
What can I give you in return, O Lord, for so much goodness?

**T. Glory to you, friend of humanity!
Glory to you, the merciful One!**

1. Glory to you, the generous one!
2. Glory to you, that absolves sins!

1. Glory to you, who came to save us!
2. Glory to you, who took flesh from the Virgin!

1. Glory to you, whose hands were bounded!
2. Glory to you, who was whipped!

1. Glory to you, who was mocked!
 2. Glory to you, who was nailed on the cross!
-
1. Glory to you, who was buried and rose from the dead!
 2. Glory to you, who was proclaimed to humanity and who believed in you!
-
1. Glory to you, who ascended into heaven!
 2. Glory to you, who is seated at the right hand of the Father:
-
1. You will come again with the glory of the Father and with the holy angels to judge those who despised your passion.
 2. In that hour, may your hand protect me under your wings and I can glorify you singing:
- T. Glory to the One who took it upon himself to save the sinner with his bountiful mercy.**
Amen.

(taken from *A gioia e gloria del Padre*, p. 424)

2. Handing over of the Icon of Jesus Christ

2.1. Introduction

After having meditated and prayed for the mercies of the Lord revealed in the love of Jesus Christ who has died and has risen for us, we want to give every member of our group an icon, or an image, of Christ. The icons or the images are a direct and immediate expressions of Christian faith. They reveal to us and present us Christ, image of the Father and of the Trinity. In fact, when Philip asked Jesus to show the Father, Jesus said: “Philip, whoever sees me, sees the Father” (Jn 14:9) In the prologue of John, we read: “the Word became flesh and dwelt among us” (Jn 1:14); in another part of the gospel of John, we read: “No one has ever seen God: except the only begotten Son... he has revealed Him” (Jn 1:18).

2.2. A Biblical Reading

Col 1:15-16

A reading from the Letter of Saint Paul to the Colossians

Brothers and sisters, Christ is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For in him were created all things in heaven and on earth, the visible and the invisible.

The Word of God.

All: Thanks be to God.

2.3. A Text from Fr. Dehon

CAM 2/123

A Reading from the Spiritual Writings of Venerable Fr. Leo Dehon

This adorable face merits all adoration, all the homage of men and the angels... This devotion to the Sacred Face produces the greatest fruits among the faithful. It stops the arms of the ungodly and turns the anger of the Lord..., it gives us lessons of patience, kindness and the resignation.

2.4. Response

Mt 11:28-30

P. Come to me, all you who labor and are burdened,

All: and I will give you rest.

P. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me,

All: for I am meek and humble of heart.

P. Come to me, all you who labor and are burdened,

All: and I will give you rest.

P. You will find rest for your spirit,

All: for my yoke is easy, and my burden light.

2.5. Handing over of the Icon

P. Receive this holy icon, so that Jesus Christ, the Savior, may be the beginning, the center and the end of your life, united to his Life.

R. *Amen.*

2.6. Ato de oblação

To the love of God revealed in the crucified Jesus Christ, to the opened side of the pierced heart, Fr. Dehon responded by giving himself to the Father for the sake of humanity. Let us renew our own oblation, using the formula of St. Ignatius of Loyola in the translation of Fr. Dehon.

All together:

Take, Lord, and receive all my liberty,

my memory, my understanding,

and my entire will,

All I have and call my own.

You have given all to me.

To you, Lord, I return it.

Everything is yours; do with it what you will.

Give me only your love and your grace,

They are enough for me.

2.7. Greeting

Gal 2:20; Eph 2:14a, 19b

P. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me.

All: For he is our peace!

P. He has loved me and has given himself for me.

All: For he is our peace!

P. He has made us fellow citizens with the saints
and the members of the household of God.

All: For he is our peace!

P. Let us offer each other a sign of Christ's peace.

(All the participants offer each other a sign of peace)

Final Hymn

INDEX

PRESENTATION.....	3
--------------------------	----------

ABBREVIATIONS OF THE WRITINGS OF FR. DEHON AND OTHER DEHONIAN PUBLICATIONS	9
---	----------

Meeting XI

FAITH EXPERIENCE: <i>ECCE VENIO</i> AND BAPTISM IN FR. DEHON.....	11
Objectives of the Meeting.....	11
Outline of the Meeting: strategies and activities	11
Development of the Meeting.....	11
A. Welcome	11
B. Reflection: <i>Ecce Venio and Baptism in Fr. Dehon</i>	12
C. Dehonian Testimony.....	17
D. Discussion Points.....	19
E. A Moment of Prayer	19
Literature	21

Meeting XII

THE FAITH EXPERIENCE OF FR. DEHON: IN GOD'S HEART – <i>ECCE VENIO</i>	23
Objectives of the Meeting.....	23
Outline of the Meeting: strategies and activities	23
Development of the Meeting.....	23
A. Welcome	23
B. Reflection: ' <i>Oblation</i> ' in Dehonian spirituality – <i>Ecce Venio</i>	23
C. Dehonian Testimony.....	29
D. Discussion Points.....	30
E. A Moment of Prayer	30
Literature	32

Meeting XIII

FAITH EXPERIENCE: IN THE HEART OF THE WORLD – <i>ADVENIAT REGNUM TUUM</i>	33
Objectives of the Meeting.....	33
Outline of the Meeting: strategies and activities	33
Development of the Meeting.....	33
A. Welcome	33
B. Reflection: <i>Reparation in the Heart of the World</i>	33
C. Dehonian Testimony.....	40
D. Discussion Points.....	41
E. A Moment of Prayer	41
Literature	43

Meeting XIV

THE FAITH EXPERIENCE OF FR. DEHON: COMMUNION – SINT UNUM	45
Objectives of the Meeting	45
Outline of the Meeting: strategies and activities	45
Development of the Meeting	45
A. Welcome	45
B. Reflection: <i>Faith Experience – Communion – Sint Unum</i>	45
C. Dehonian Testimony.....	52
D. Discussion Points.....	53
E. A moment of Prayer	53
Literature	55

Meeting XV

THE DEHONIAN LAITY IN THE CHURCH	57
Objectives of the Meeting	57
Outline of the Meeting: strategies and activities	57
Development of the Meeting	57
A. Welcome	57
B. Reflection: <i>The Charism and Mission of the Lay Dehonian in the Church</i>	57
C. Dehonian Testimony.....	63
D. Discussion Points.....	65
E. A Moment of Time.....	65
Literature	67

Meeting XVI THE LAY DEHONIAN, A DISCIPLE OF THE MASTER, JESUS.....

Objectives of the Meeting	69
Outline of the Meeting: strategies and activities	69
Development of the Meeting	69
A. Welcome	69
B. Reflection: <i>Lay Dehonian, Disciple of the Master Jesus</i>	69
C. Dehonian Testimony.....	76
D. Discussion Points.....	77
E. A Moment of Prayer	77
Literature	78

Meeting XVII COMPANIONS ON THE JOURNEY: THE SAINTS OF THE SACRED HEART

Objectives of the meeting	79
Outline of the Meeting: strategies and activities	79
Development of the Meeting	79
A. Welcome	79
B. Reflection: <i>Companions on the Journey – The Saints of the Sacred Heart</i>	79
C. Dehonian Testimony.....	86
D. Discussion Points.....	87
E. A Moment of Prayer	87
Literature	89

Meeting XVIII

FR. DEHON AND PRAYER.....	91
Objectives of the Meeting.....	91
Outline of the Meeting: strategies and activities	91
Development of the Meeting.....	91
A. Welcome	91
B. Reflection: <i>Fr. Dehon and Prayer</i>	91
C. Dehonian Testimony.....	96
D. Discussion Points.....	97
E. A Moment of Prayer	97
Literature.....	100

Meeting XIX

FR. DEHON AND THE ACT OF OBLATION.....	101
Objectives of the Meeting.....	101
Outline of the Meeting: strategies and activities.....	101
Development of the Meeting	101
A. Welcome.....	101
B. Reflection: <i>The Oblation of our Life</i>	101
C. Dehonian Testimony	106
D. Discussion Points	107
E. A Moment of Prayer.....	108
Literature.....	109

Meeting XX

FR. DEHON AND THE SOCIAL DIMENSION	111
Objectives of the Meeting.....	111
Outline of the Meeting: strategies and activities.....	111
Development of the Meeting	111
A. Welcome.....	111
B. Reflection: <i>Fr. Dehon and the Social Dimension</i>	111
C. Dehonian Testimony	118
D. Discussion Points	119
E. A Moment of Prayer.....	120
Literature.....	121

FINAL CELEBRATION

AND HANDING OVER OF AN ICON OF JESUS CHRIST.....	123
---	------------

INDEX	129
--------------------	------------