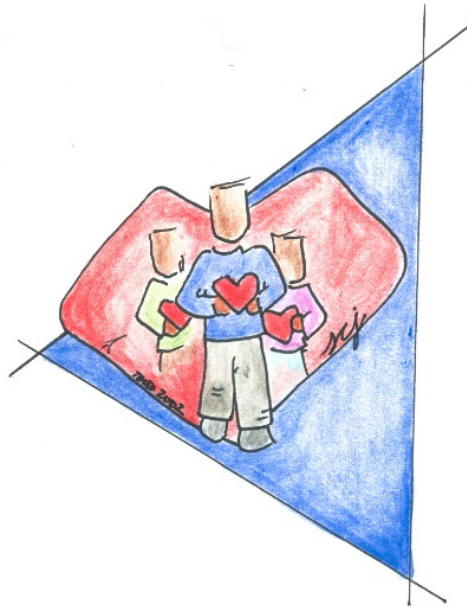


**THE SPIRITUAL PATH
FOR LAY DEHONIANS**

WITH DEHON IN THE 21ST CENTURY

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



YEAR FOUR

FOR THE LIFE OF THE WORLD

That they may have life and have it in abundance (John 10.10)

Rome, 2016

Contributors to the development of the Project of the Spiritual Path are many people, both confreres and lay Dehonians, to whom we express our gratitude:

Working Group: Fr. Adérito Gomes Barbosa (POR), Fr. Bruno Pilati (ITS), Fr. Ramón Domínguez Fraile (ESP), Fr. Josef Gawel (POL), Fr. Vincenzo Martino (ITM), Fr. Fernando Rodrigues Fonseca (POR), Fr. Ricardo Jorge Freire (POR), Paola de Angelis (lay consecrated, IT) e Serafina Ribeiro CM.

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YEAR IV – PRESENTATION

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

We are happy to present to you the Fourth Year of the Spiritual Path for the formation of Lay Dehonians.

Several groups already use the first and second year, which deal with familiarity with the spirituality of Father Dehon and with the faith experience of Fr. Dehon. Year Three is still being translated in the different languages. Its original language was Italian. With the presentation of Year Four, *For the Life of the World* we complete the 40 themes of the *Spiritual Path*. Year Four was prepared by the Anglophone members of the Congregation. By completing Year Four, the venture to give a formation to the spirituality of the Heart of Christ according to the charism of Fr. Dehon is now complete.

In order for you to make best use of these aids, here are some pointers useful for the team leaders and to the Dehonian formators:

- The Dehonian Family is present in 40 countries. This means an enormous wealth of values, cultural expressions and distinct levels of religious and Dehonian formation. This diversification is a real challenge to the idea of proposing one Spiritual Path for all. We are aware that it is not possible to satisfy the needs of every cultural reality. We can only suggest that in every country, leaders and trainers will feel free to adapt the texts as well as possible.
- Adaptation should enhance and develop especially different forms of reception, pedagogical resources, involvement of the participants in the reflection, complementary or different readings in each of the languages, the organization of local churches in the planning at national, diocesan or parish level, the choice of songs and ways of celebrating, in accordance with the local culture.
- The texts are extensive and fully developed. They are designed for a whole year of formation, with a theme per month. They can also be used for weekly or fortnightly meetings. They can be helpful also for study days, and for spiritual retreats or meetings. It is up to the groups to set the pace and the frequency of the meetings.
- The citation of Dehon texts uses the method of citation introduced by the Centro Studi of Rome in www.dehondocs.it. To facilitate identification of the texts mentioned in the Spiritual Path, we present the sigla below in the introduction.
- This *Spiritual Path* is not a final manual. It is proposed *ad experimentum* so that it can be improved upon making use of the talents of others. Feel free to adapt the text so that it may be more useful to your country or context. There is nothing sacred about this text. However, please, do send all observations and proposals for improvement to one of the members in the International Coordinating Group (GCI) of the Dehonian Family, so that the changes can be passed on to other groups using the same language or to the international program.
- The Working Group that developed this project also offers other methodological aids to group animators and formators regarding personal accompaniment and of groups of lay people who want to undertake the path of growth in Dehonian spirituality. There are three texts:

- Methods for the Christian education of adults. Details for various groups of Dehonian Family are provided for by P. Adérito Barbosa scj and Celina Pires alvd
- The text to help the person who accompanies the group was composed by P. Rinaldo Paganelli SCJ
- The text to help the accompanying and counseling groups was written by Serafina Ribeiro CM.

In May 2017, there will be an *International Meeting* of the Dehonian Family. One of the objectives of this meeting will be to form a permanent group of coordination, to carry forward the animation and development of the Dehonian Family, and coordinate the different realities that constitute it. One of the objectives of the assembly is to form a Coordinating Group, who will carry forward the animation and the development of the Dehonian Family, which was formed provisionally at the meeting of May 2014, namely:

- Rosalie Grace M. Escobia – rgme1971@yahoo.com – Philipines,
- Ida Coelho – idajpcoelho@yahoo.com.br – Brazil, representatives of the laity;
- Silvia Bertozzi – silvia.bertozzi@gmail.com – Italian, missionary in Finland, for consecrated persons;
- Fr. Bruno Pilati, ITS – bruno.pilati@dehoniani.it – for the religious of the SCJ Congregation
- With the new general administration elected in 2015: Fr. Artur Sanecki – artur.sanecki@dehon.it member of the General Council of the Congregation.

We hope that the proposed topics will help everyone to grow spiritually in dialogue with the path of faith taken by Dehon. We cordially thank all those who contributed to this Spiritual Path.

Fr. John van den Hengel scj
 Ottawa, Canada
 April 2, 2017

INTRODUCTORY NOTE

Year Four contains ten meetings. They are numbered from 31 to 40. It concludes with a celebration and an induction ceremony into the Dehonian Family.

- **Meeting XXXI** *A life “in love”: How to live the love of God in this world?*
- **Meeting XXXII** *Open to the world*
- **Meeting XXXIII** *Dehon and God’s mercy*
- **Meeting XXXIV** *Participating in the reign of charity and justice*
- **Meeting XXXV** *Sharing in Mission*
- **Meeting XXXVI** *Involved in social spirituality*
- **Meeting XXXVII** *Meditation with Fr. Dehon*
- **Meeting XXXVIII** *Contemplation and action*
- **Meeting XXXIX** *Accompaniment and spiritual direction*
- **Meeting XL** *Dehonian Family*

Ritual: The giving of the Dehonian Cross and the Symbol of Salt and Light

General Objectives of Year IV

To grow spiritually in dialogue with the faith experience of Fr. Dehon, especially in his social commitments.

Specific Objectives of Year IV

- To recognize the power of love in the social spirituality of Fr. Dehon.
- To become more aware of the social spirituality of Fr. Dehon as a gift
- To grow in the prayer life and social commitments of Fr. Dehon
- To prepare to become more closely associated with the Dehonian Family

Strategies and activities

All themes contain the following points:

Objectives of the Meeting

Structure of the Meeting

Development of the Meeting

- A. Welcome
 - a. A text from the Bible
 - b. A text from Fr. Dehon
- B. Reflection
- C. Testimony
- D. Discussion and sharing
- E. A Moment of Prayer

Each session will begin with the presentation of the specific objectives for the theme, followed by a brief description of the way that the meeting is to achieve the objectives.

Particular care has been given to the contents of each theme. Generally they have been prepared by English-speaking members in various parts of the world. Since the Dehonian Family has not been as

well established in the Anglophone countries of the Congregation, Year IV has not been able to draw on testimonials of lay Dehonians. The following have been the main writers of Year IV: Fr. Delio Ruiz scj (PHI), Br. Duane Lemke scj (USA), Fr. P. J. McGuire scj (USA), Fr. Heinz Lau scj (GER), Fr. Bruno Pilati scj (ITS), Fr. John van den Hengel scj (CAN).

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

I – Writings of Fr. Dehon

<i>Title</i>	<i>Sigla</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>Retraite Sacerdotale</u>	RSD	
<u>Retraite sur la Mer (1906)</u>	RME	
<u>Richesse, Médiocrité, Pauvreté</u>	RMP	OSC III
<u>Sœur Marie de Jésus</u>	SMJ	OSP 6
<u>Souvenirs</u>	SVN	OSP 7
<u>Supplements</u>	SPL	
<u>Thesaurus</u>	THE	OSP 7
<u>Thèse pour la Licence</u>	THL	OSC IV
<u>Thèse pour le Doctorat</u>	THD	OSC IV
<u>Un Prêtre du Sacré-Cœur de Jésus</u>	PSC	OSP 6
<u>Vie Intérieure : Exercices Spirituels</u>	VES	OSP 5
<u>Vie Intérieure : Principes</u>	VPR	OSP 5

II – Way to cite NHV and NQT

NHV	NHV IX, 136
NQT	a) <i>testo P. Dehon:</i> NQT III/1887, 106 b) <i>note CGS:</i> NQT 5, 592, n.13 c) <i>rinvio ai volumi:</i> NQT 1 – 5, pp...

III – Way to cite Le Règne du Cœur de Jésus

<u>Le Règne du Cœur de Jésus</u>	RCJ	1-12 (1889) 211
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IV – Way to cite the publications of CGS

<u>Dehoniana</u>	DEH	DEH 3/1999, 89
<u>Studia Dehoniana</u>	STD	STD 25/2, 1994, 209

Meeting XXXI
A LIFE “IN LOVE”:
HOW TO LIVE THE LOVE OF GOD IN THIS WORLD?

Objectives of the Meeting

- To introduce lay Dehonians to the moral, ethical repercussions of God’s love for us;
- To explore the repercussions of the ethics of the heart;
- To enter into the Dehonian attitude of heart: cordiality

Structure of the Meeting

- The theme begins with a presentation of Fr. Dehon as “le très bon père”
- “Being in love”: A first approach to a life of love
- A presentation of the ethics of the heart by a study of the beatitudes of Jesus
- “It was said of old” - “but I say to you”: the ethics of the kingdom of God
- Activities around “generosity of spirit”
- An attitude of heart: cordiality

Development of the Meeting

A. Welcome

Since this is the first session of the year, welcome new members and allow the other members to speak about what has happened in their lives since the last meeting. Since the scriptural theme of the year is “That they may have life and have it in abundance” (John 10.10) ask each participant to say what life in abundance means for them.

This theme wants to explore “life in fullness” in greater detail. Dehon believed strongly in the love of God for him. As followers of his spirituality we want to learn how we might live in the love of God. In short, this theme will be a brief introduction to Christian ethical or moral life. We can only touch the surface of this moral life. It takes us all our lives to enter into this more and more. For the heart of Christian moral living we will turn to the beatitudes. For Jesus that was the heart of his message.

A word from the Bible: Life according to the beatitudes (Matthew 5.1-11)

When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain; and after he sat down, his disciples came to him. Then he began to speak, and taught them, saying:

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

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

"Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

"Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.

"Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

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

"Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

"Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account.

A word from Fr. Dehon

“Our Lord gives the souls devoted to his heart special gifts, but he also asks them special virtues. They must also practice the ordinary virtues according to their condition and vocation, but a few virtues must shine especially in them. The first, symbolized by gold, is the pure, true and sincere love.

Our Lord asks us the gold of pure love in one’s intentions, a living faith and unwavering filial trust. When the gold is fine and pure, one notices even a trace of the slightest touch, even a breeze weakens its brilliance. It is a pure gold that our Lord asks of the friends of his heart. It is a pure, faithful and delicate love. This perfection is not too much for the gift to the King of hearts. It can attain it by cooperating faithfully with divine grace which is given in abundance to the friends of the Sacred Heart.” (ASC 1/66)

“Nature of the pure love:

- the love of God for himself without reasons of self-interest, generous love, selfless.
- A love not because of the benefits, even less because of fear of punishment: the soul thrives in the beloved object.

Forms of pure love:

1. love of shared joy in the glory of God, in its inner and outer forms.
2. love of sympathy: sadness, compassion, reparation because God is not, has not been, known, loved, served as He should be by us, by the faithful, particularly by consecrated souls.” (CFL 3/72)

B. Reflection on the theme

1. Introduction: An ethics of the heart

How to live in this world when God is “in love” with us. Father Dehon had a great desire all his life to know God’s love in his life. In previous meetings we have explored this love. We have asked to have a similar faith in our own life that sustained Fr. Dehon. We want to live in the security of God’s love for me, for the world, for our family.

In this session, we want to take this a step further. We want to understand better what it means to live this love of God for me. If God loves me – as he showed in Jesus, particularly in the open side of Jesus, Jesus dead on the cross – what sort of life style is open to me? How do I live with someone who is “in love” with me? More specifically, how do I live with a God who loves me so totally?

2. “Being in love”: a first approach to a life of love

Yesterday, the post brought me a gift. It was beautifully packaged, accompanied by a card. I had known Mireille for a long time. We had always exchanged greetings on important occasions, but she had never sent a gift. The care with which the gift was chosen and the beautiful wrapping and card was a generous gesture to me. A lot of thought had gone into this gift. In the note she said, “I

am sending you this out of the blue. I came across this book and I thought of you. Please, accept the gift as an appreciation.” I was deeply touched by the gesture. I knew that she did not expect a gift in return. Her gift was not intended to obligate me to give her something. Yet, I could not not give her something as a recognition of her generosity.

Does this story ring true to you? Gift-giving is a deeply engraved human need. With all the strength of our person we reach out to another to show our attitude, our sensitivity, our feeling for the other person. It is not intended to be a commercial interaction. It is not intended as an “I give so that you may give.” It is totally gratuitous. And yet, the very action of giving by another makes an appeal to me to return the gesture with one of my own. The generosity of the other awakens in me a generosity in return. What is it about generosity?

3. An ethics of the heart: the beatitudes of Jesus

Take a moment and go back to the beatitudes. Let the members of the group read out loud, each member a beatitude, followed by a period of silence.

In the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus, like a second Moses, goes up the mountain. Moses had received from God on Mount Sinai the gift of the Ten Words (better known as the Ten Commandments). These gifts were to instruct the Israelites about the meaning of the Covenant that God was making with Israel. It spelled out that relationship. The language of the covenant relationship was one of duty. Each of the ten words was introduced with “Thou shalt” – “Thou shalt not.” Its call to love God with all our hearts and all our souls, it said, was clarified by what was to be human behavior to be avoided. If you love God, you do not steal, you do not lie, you do not commit adultery, you will respect the goods of your neighbour. The God of the Israelites did not demand onerous sacrifices, only an ethical life. Respecting God – not to take God’s name in vain – meant to do justice, to have an eye for the orphan and the widow, not to exclude anyone from the community.

When Jesus climbs the mountain, he does not reiterate the ten words. He did not give a new law like the old one. The language is different. It is a language of blessing. He declares blessed certain people. Somewhat like Mireille’s gift: a gratuitous gift, the people who are blessed cannot lay claim to being declared blessed. Like the poor – for Matthew even the “poor in spirit”, that is, the utterly poor also in their soul – are declared blessed. Why? Not as a counterbalance to their poverty, not because the poor are more worthy than others! Only because God declares them to be such. They can make no claim – just as we cannot make a claim. There is no debt that God wants to pay to the poor for their miserable lives. The only reason is that there is no reason – except something in God. Jesus begins his ministry of the kingdom of God by saying that this ministry is one of utter generosity. What stands out – as with the gift of Mireille – is the attitude, the rush of generosity of a Giver.

Christian ethical life does not begin with rules, with guidelines for action, with laws or commandments. Actually it does not tell us what to do. It begins with a declaration of the utter and inexplicable generosity of God. It is a declaration of his love, absolute excess of love, so great that it allows us to get a glimpse of the sensitivity and ground of God. This is a God of utter, mind boggling love. Ethical life begins with this gift of love. St. Augustine once said of Christian life: “Love and do what you will.” He was right. Know this love that envelops the earth, that envelops human life. Trust it as the foundation of your life. And then do what your heart tells you to do. We

sometimes call this gift of God to us the Holy Spirit, insisting that the gift God gave is only Godself. This gift of the Spirit in us can guide us in what we do with the gift.

And so, the Christian life does not begin with rules for action. Actually, the first response, as to the gift of Mireille, is to send a message of thanks. For Christians that is to celebrate thanksgiving – Eucharist. We participate in Eucharist because it actually re-enacts the action of giving of the Father. The Eucharist is a memorial of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. That means that the gift we give back is the very gift we have received but attached to the gift is ourselves: our lives, our insignificant gift of bread and wine and gifts to the poor. What else can we give as a gift? We will always be careful that it does not deteriorate to a commercial interaction. It cannot be that we respond with fear of the giver, fear that we cannot “pay” enough.

We say that Christian life is actually dependent on the Spirit that has come into our hearts with our acceptance of God’s love for us. We are free. The Spirit at the core of our being gives us what to say and do, Jesus told us. It is the freedom and affirmation that I have received that is to be the source of my own generosity. God’s gift of love makes me capable to respond. It will not tell us what we need to give or how much. What God seems to want is not obedience to rules but the gift of ourselves in generosity. And that gift of ourselves is like God’s gift in Christ a gift to others in doing justice, to be prophets of love and servants of reconciliation.

This is the ethics of the heart: to do what in freedom an awakened love calls us to do. Can that same energy that set all this in motion in God find in us a similar energy to take this Name of God where it is not heard or experienced? That is a Christian ethics of the heart: have the same mind in you that was in Jesus Christ. (Phil 2.5)

4. “It was said of old” - “but I say to you”: the ethics of the kingdom of God

If what we as Christians are asked is to have the same mind as was in Christ Jesus, we need to turn to his teaching, particularly his teaching of the Sermon on the Mount. In it we find not only the beatitudes we have just looked at, but a lengthy teaching that is centered on the one Jesus called “Abba-Father.” The followers of Jesus are to be perfect as the heavenly Abba/Father is perfect. (Mt 5.48) But how can we be so perfect? Isn’t that an impossible task? If we think that, we are perhaps only thinking in terms of rules and commandments. If this is what we have to accomplish, one could only be and feel unremittingly guilty. But Jesus must have had something else in mind, when he said this. Actually, he gives us five examples in the Sermon on the Mount, that what it means to be perfect as the Abba/Father is perfect. If we were to take these examples literally as things we are required to do, we would be in great difficulties as Christians. Let us look at these examples and seek to learn what “having the same mind that was in Christ Jesus” might mean.

In every example, Jesus draws a contrast between what the Law and the Prophets taught – that is the Old Testament outside of the Books of Wisdom – and what he proposes is Abba/Father’s way of being perfect. Jesus does not take away the Old Testament; he only seeks to give it its deepest meaning.

It will help if you read the section in Matthew’s gospel where Jesus draws these antitheses: 5. 21-48.

a. *First antithesis: Matthew 5.21-26: Total respect for the other*

In this antithesis, Jesus gives a new interpretation to the fifth commandment: “You shall not murder.” But he goes much further: if you are angry with a brother or sister, or insult them, or denigrate them in anyway, you are not reflecting your heavenly Abba/Father. Jesus says, every angry impulse against one’s brother or sister is as damnable as murder. Anything that lessens the dignity of another person, anything that harms relationships with others is not a reflection of God or does not speak correctly about the Name of God. The name of the Abba/Father is witnessed only in the most correct relationship with one another. Everyone’s humanity is precious and reflects the glory of God. Let us remember this is not a commandment! If it were, we would all stand condemned. It does instruct us about the unfathomable holiness and intense respect with which the Abba/Father holds us. This is, according to Jesus, the Abba/Father’s gift: an utter respect for us. What would be an appropriate gift in return? The Abba/Father would be honoured, if we could show a respect for others with the best generosity we are capable of.

You have heard that it was said to those of ancient times, "You shall not murder"; and "whoever murders shall be liable to judgment." But I say to you that if you are angry with a brother or sister, you will be liable to the council; and if you say, "You fool," you will be liable to the hell brother or sister, you will be liable to judgment; and if you insult a of fire. So when you are offering your gift at the altar, if you remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother or sister, and then come and offer your gift. Come to terms quickly with your accuser while you are on the way to court with him, or your accuser may hand you over to the judge, and the judge to the guard, and you will be thrown into prison. Truly I tell you, you will never get out until you have paid the last penny.

(Matthew 5.21-26)

b. *Second antithesis: Matthew 5.27-32: What God has united, let no one come between...*

You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery'. But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust has already committed adultery with her in his heart. If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away; it is better for you to lose one of your members than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away; it is better for you to lose one of your members than your whole body to go into hell. It was also said, 'Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce. But I say to you that anyone who divorces his wife, except on the ground of unchastity, causes her to commit adultery; and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery.

(Matthew 5.27.31)

Jesus gives a new interpretation to the sixth commandment: “You shall not commit adultery” by connecting it with the tenth commandment: “You shall not covet your neighbor’s wife.” He insists that casting a look of lust at a woman – desiring to possess her sexually – is the same as adultery. Jesus presents here a teaching on the meaning of sexuality and marriage. He points to the interior disposition of coveting. To covet, to desire to possess the other – male or female - is the same as the act of adultery. Here again Jesus gives a reflection of the Abba/Father in terms of the relationships of marriage. Here again, if this was a commandment, we would all stand condemned. Jesus is trying to translate for us who is this Abba/Father by talking to us in terms of our relations with women (and men!). By using the terrifying image of tearing out your eyes, Jesus makes the reader aware of the utter respect one must have of the other also in the realm

of the sexual. This sacredness of the bonds that unite man and woman to each other is seen as a reflection of the Abba/Father. The glory of the Abba/Father lies in the respecting of the promises that bind humans together. What sort of gift can we make in return?

c. *Third antithesis: Matthew 5.33-37: keeping your word*

Jesus gives a new interpretation to the Jewish custom of making an oath to do something by pronouncing the name of God or another sacred thing. Jesus is against oaths. God's holy name is not to be used frivolously. The name is too sacred for us to use even in oaths. One's word should be solid enough. One does not have to invoke a higher name or power (like putting your hand on the bible) when you promise something. Your own word – your own intention spoken – should be enough. The image of the Abba/Father which Jesus gives here is a beautiful one. We may always trust the word of the Abba/Father; it does not change. That is also true of the Word – what the Abba/Father has spoken through Jesus. That word has the full power and love of the one who spoke it: Abba/Father. Our world would reflect this Abba/Father if everyone kept their solemn word.

You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.' But I say to you, Do not resist an evildoer. But if anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn the other also; and if anyone wants to sue you and take your coat, give cloak as well; and if anyone forces you to go one mile, go also the second mile. Give to everyone who begs from you, and do not refuse anyone who wants to borrow from you.

(Matthew 5.33-37)

d. *Fourth antithesis: Mathhew 5.38-42: respond to evil with good*

You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbours and hate your enemy.'? But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may children of your Father in heaven, for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous. For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet only your brothers and sisters, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

(Matthew 5.38-42)

Jesus here refers to the law of talion (Ex. 21.23-25): an eye for an eye. "A tooth for a tooth" is to do back to the person what he or she has done to us. But not more! Only an eye for an eye! The law of talion was intended to limit the level of vengeance and retaliation. Only a tooth for a tooth! However, Jesus goes much further: don't resist the evildoer by returning blow for blow. Respond to evil with good. That too is a beautiful image of Abba/Father: a God who does not take vengeance but only responds to evil – also our evil - with goodness. Very few of us know how to do this. Give to everyone who begs us from you? Jesus encourages to give everything! That is the image of Abba/ Father.

e. *Fifth antithesis: Matthew 5.43-48: love your*

enemies

In light of the perfection of Abba/Father, Jesus redefines love of neighbour (Lev. 19.18) as a gesture of goodness to all others, even one's enemy. How is it possible to love the one you cannot love (that is, the one you hate), or love the one who hates you? How can we refrain ourselves from doing any harm? That is, according to Jesus, what Abba/Father does. Abba/Father does what we cannot do. Can we even begin to imagine what that means? How are we to be imitators of Abba/Father?

Again you have heard that it was said to those in ancient times, 'You shall not swear falsely, but carry out the vows you have made to the Lord.' But I say to you, Do not swear at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God, or by the earth, for it is his footstool, or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King. And do not swear by your hair, for you cannot make one hair white or black. Let your word be: 'Yes, Yes' or 'No, No'; anything more than this comes from the evil one.

(Matthew 5.43-48)

5. Fr. Dehon as “le très bon père”

Fr. Dehon was known as a very gentle, trusting person. It was not difficult, in view of his life, to call him “good”. That is the impression he gave to those who were in his presence. He was even known as “le très bon père” to distinguish him from Léon Harmel, the great industrialist with whom Fr. Dehon began his apostolate with the workers, who was known as “le bon père.”

The warmth of his personality he may have in part inherited from his mother who was deeply attached to Léon. But all his life Fr. Dehon was attentive to others. He always gave an impression of spontaneity with anyone with whom he was in conversation. He was totally attention for them, as if nothing else mattered: young or old, poor or influential. He had no difficulty staying in touch also with those who disagreed with him. He remained discretely silent when others confronted him. He wrote numerous letters to confreres and friends on the occasion of birthdays and other celebrations. He could not think evil of persons. He was often too trusting even of those who, like Fr. Captier, in the first moments of the Congregation, did not deserve this trust.

In his diary, even when he was going through difficult moments with confreres, we find little direct reference to the slights and confrontations. Usually he does not mention names. He can say nothing negative about persons. A good example is his relationship to Fr. Blancal. Fr. Blancal was the superior of the motherhouse of the Congregation in St. Quentin, La Maison du Sacré-Coeur, but he was also ambitious. He had a basic disagreement about Fr. Dehon’s social engagement and he sought on two occasions to supplant Fr. Dehon as the Superior General of the Congregation. After Fr. Dehon was re-confirmed as Superior General in 1896 – Fr. Blancal had made a great effort to have him removed from office during the Chapter – he was pretty well exiled from the community. Fr. Blancal was a monarchist. Fr. Dehon was a democrat (at least at that time). Fr. Blancal had also taken over completely the role that Fr. Dehon previously had with the Soeurs Servantes especially the friendship with the superior. Fr. Dehon never says a word about this conflict; he always remained a gentleman showing a great nobility of heart.

In the end the patience and generosity of Fr. Dehon even made Fr. Blancal turn around. A witness tells us that he often saw Fr. Dehon and Fr. Blancal spending the time of recreation together, talking like friends. (AD, B 48/3, p. 52) And when Fr. Blancal was expelled from the motherhouse in 1903 because of the anti-religious legislation of the French Government (Prime minister Combes), Fr. Dehon had him come to Fayet, where he died in the arms of Fr. Dehon at the age of 80. In his diary all Dehon says is that he was a zealous priest, a pious man, much esteemed and loved in the diocese of Soissons. (NQT 19/114)

It makes goodness, the nobility of the soul, an essential part of the dehonian style of life.¹

C. Testimony

If at the end of this reflection we want to look at a virtue of Fr. Dehon – what the Greek philosopher Aristotle called “excellences”, that is, excellent ways of living – we might look at cordiality as a virtue of lay Dehonians.

Among Dehonians the virtue that most reflects this attitude of love in all our actions is called cordiality. André Perroux defined cordiality as the way of love: “to serve God, to follow Christ, to proclaim his Gospel among people *with one’s heart*, that is with all the resources of one’s heart.”²

¹ See G. Manzoni, *Leone Dehon e il suo messaggio*, p. 511-2.

² A. Perroux, *Une pratique pastorale inspirée de notre spiritualité*. Studia Dehoniana 18, p. 36.

Nothing can replace the heart, being near to others, goodness. St. Paul said it well, the way of love is the “infinitely superior way”. (1Co 12.31) Seek to be loved: that is a counsel of Fr. Dehon that sums up his whole life. In him it was the fruit of his daily meditation on the human life of Jesus. The heart of Jesus is revealed especially in his way of relating to others, in his interaction with the crowds, in his gripping attention to the sick and the fallen among us. Jesus was the genius in the way he met others. In cordiality we imitate this Jesus as also Dehon sought to do. Not for nothing he was called, “le très bon père.” Also from us should emanate a spirit of friendship.

Invite the participants to recall for one another the story of people whom they have known who have a similar generosity of spirit, the same cordiality, as Fr. Dehon.

D. Discussion and Sharing

Having read the Sermon on the Mount and reflected on the beatitudes and the antitheses of Jesus, can we think of other ways in which to reflect Abba/Father in our lives? How can we be a reflection of Abba/Father in our lives? What does this mean for you?

In the *Rule of Life* of Dehonians, it is said of Father Dehon that “in the open side and pierced Heart of the Savior,” he had experienced that God loved him. (# 2). Where in your life do you find the proof that God loves you?

What action in your life bespeaks of a generosity for the other? Where are you open to the other and do things that are just generous? Take time to sharpen your awareness of the power in you to do good to the other?

E. A Moment of Prayer

For the prayer, follow the sequence here indicated. One may have to find another song, add other gestures and prayers, according to the circumstances.

A hymn: Make me a channel of your peace

(Check internet for melody)

Make me a channel of your peace
Where there is hatred let me bring Your love
Where there is injury, your pardon Lord
And where there is doubt, true faith in You

Make me a channel of your peace
Where there's despair in life let me bring hope
Where there is darkness, only light
And where there's sadness ever joy

Oh, Master grant that I may never seek
So much to be consoled as to console
To be understood as to understand
To be loved as to love with all my soul

Make me a channel of your peace
It isn't pardoning that we are pardoned

In giving to all men let we receive
And in dying that we're born to turn around

Oh, Master grant that I may never seek
So much to be consoled as to console
To be understood as to understand
To be loved as to love with all my soul

Make me a channel of your peace
Where there's despair in life let me bring hope
Where there is darkness, only light
And where there's sadness ever joy

Introduction

To live in love is the greatest possible gift. It is to live in God's graciousness as an absolute gift. For most to trust that this love is there for me without reserve is a very difficult gift to accept. We feel much more in our element to go for the tit-for-tat. If God gives, we think, he must want something in return. But God is not such a wheeler dealer. God can be pure generosity. We rarely are truly generous.

Word of God (Romans 8. 31-35, 37-39)

“What then are we to say about these things? If God is for us, who is against us? He who did not withhold his own Son, but gave him up for all of us, will he not with him also give us everything else? Who will bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? It is Christ Jesus, who died, yes, who was raised, who is at the right hand of God who indeed intercedes for. Who will separate us from the love of Christ?

For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor heights, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

Story

During the Romanian dictatorship of Elena and Nicolae Ceaucescu in the 1980s a woman spoke out against the dictatorship in words that must have been true. Because of her courage she was marked for secret execution. When the henchmen of the party came to her house, she let them in. When they wanted to tie her up and blindfold her, she persuaded them to let her go to her room and change her clothing. Totally surprised by her request, they agreed. The woman came back a short while later in her best finery, with make-up and her hair done up. She turned to her executioners and said, “You may now do what you have been ordered to do. Thank you for letting be put on my best clothing. I would not want to be sent to meet my Lord without a proper dress.” Her executioners were so overwhelmed by her response that without a word they turned around and left the house.

This woman understood love. Hers was an intimate, generous love of friends. It is the kind of love that we are urged to consider and live in following Fr. Dehon. It is the love - the desire of love - that

we have been reflecting upon in this meeting. We find it expressed in paragraph 9 of the Constitutions: “Within the Church, it says, we have been initiated in the Good News of Jesus Christ: *We have come to know and to believe in the love God has for us.*” (1John 4.16) And the text continues: “We have received the gift of faith, which grounds our hope; a faith which orders our life and inspires us to leave all to follow Christ; in the midst of the challenge of the world we have to strengthen this faith through living it in charity.”

Psalm 103: *Thanksgiving for God's Goodness*

Bless the LORD, O my soul,
and all that is within me,
bless his holy name.

Bless the LORD, O my soul,
and do not forget all his benefits—
who forgives all your iniquity,
who heals all your diseases,
who redeems your life from the Pit,
who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy,
who satisfies you with good as long as you live
so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's.

The LORD is merciful and gracious,
slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.
He will not always accuse,
nor will he keep his anger for ever.
He does not deal with us according to our sins,
nor repay us according to our iniquities.
For as the heavens are high above the earth,
so great is his steadfast love towards those who fear him;
as far as the east is from the west,
so far he removes our transgressions from us.
As a father has compassion for his children,
so the LORD has compassion for those who fear him.
For he knows how we were made;
he remembers that we are dust.
Bless the LORD, O my soul.

A moment of sharing

Take a quiet moment to allow the word of God to enter into your mind and heart. If you wish to make a prayer of intercession do so quietly. At the end pray together the prayer of Père André Prévot, one of the early followers of Fr. Dehon:

*"I will try to repeat to myself at every opportunity:
you must let overflow the measure of charity.
If my self-love says: you need to defend your rights, I will reply:
you must let overflow the measure of charity.*

If sloth says: you need a rest, I will reply:

you must let overflow the measure of charity.

If the prudence of the flesh suggests

that we should not overdo things in order not lose prestige, I will reply:

you must let overflow the measure of charity.

If I feel embarrassed, tired, I'll say again to myself:

come on, you have to overfill the extent of charity.

On my part, then, when I need some help, advice, a correction, a consolation, maybe forgiveness or relief for my body and soul, go to Jesus:

"Good master. You promised you would recompense us with the same measure, I need also you to let overflow the measure of charity. "³

Final hymn: Ubi caritas et amor, Deus ibi est (3X)

Literature

- Pope Benedict XVI: Encyclical Letter: *Deus caritas est*. (Vatican website)

³ *A gioia del Padre. Libro di preghiera per la Famiglia Dehoniana* (Milano – Napoli, 1994), p. 482.

Meeting XXXII

OPEN TO THE WORLD

Objectives of the Meeting

- To understand the spirituality underlying Fr. Dehon’s social outreach
- To enter into a spirituality that is also social
- To discover practical ways in which we can be open to the world.

Structure of the Meeting

This session reflects on Fr. Dehon’s particular vision of his ministry. It is well known that Fr. Dehon viewed the situation of the church in the 1870’s to be in a state of crisis. He saw Catholics in his parish in Saint Quentin suffering from the immensely dehumanizing conditions imposed by the industrialization process of the Industrial Revolution. He was saddened that the church was not responding. So he did. In this session, we will explore Fr. Dehon’s spirituality reaching out to the workers of his time. It can teach us – even in the 21st century – how we live our spiritual lives in the midst of the social movements. For Fr. Dehon “The joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the people of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted” (Vatican II: *Gaudium et spes*, no. 1) need to be ours as well.

Development of the Meeting

A. Welcome

The participants are asked to recall persons whom they know and who are fully engaged in a social apostolate. Also, have them bring to the group what sort of justice activities they are personally engaged in. After the participants, have had an opportunity to get a first taste of the topic, invite them to listen to the reading from scripture.

A word from the Bible

O LORD my God, you are very great.

You make springs gush forth in the valleys;
they flow between the hills, giving drink to every
wild animal; the wild asses quench their thirst.

By the streams* the birds of the air have their
habitation; they sing among the branches.

From your lofty abode you water the mountains;
the earth is satisfied with the fruit of your work.

I will sing to the LORD as long as I live;

I will sing praise to my God while I have being. (*Psalm 104.1,10 -13, 33*)

A word from Fr. Dehon

“Yes, it is *confiance* (a sense of safety and security in the presence of the Lord) which saves us. It is *confiance* which leads us to interior life, to contemplation. It is *confiance* which makes us perfect in forgetting self, for those who do not have or have little *confiance* in the Sacred Heart they have an excess of *confiance* in themselves. Now this *confiance* in the Sacred Heart comes from the Gospel and is nourished by prayer. Let us read, let us meditate on the Gospel. Let us taste and see how good is the Heart of Jesus and our *confiance* like our love will be without limits.” (CAM 1/268).

B. Reflection on the theme

1. Fr. Dehon’s social spirituality

When the studious P. Dehon with all his doctorates ends up being the seventh curé of the Basilica parish in Saint-Quentin at age 29, he broke with most of the approaches to parish ministry. He developed a strategy which seemed from the outside to be totally focused on the marginalized. He sought contact with the new industrial world, with *Cercles d’études* on social issues, with uneducated youth. In an almost unsustainable rush of energy, his pastoral ministry turned social. It became clear quite quickly that traditional pastoral ministry did not suit him – sacramental ministry, catechism, visiting the sick. It was too limiting for him. It allowed contacts, as he says, only with some “selected families.” For Dehon the world was bigger and the energy of society was going in a totally different direction. Because of this his parish work became like a chain around his neck. As he said, “I have only the greatest repugnance for this type of ministry, but I did nothing about it.” (NHV 12/126)⁴ What he did do, however, was to found a congregation shortly after he made the remark.

It certainly got him out of the sacristy. He became totally committed to the social movements of his time. We need only to look at the books that he began to write that stand alongside his more spiritual oeuvres. Fr. Dehon’s spirit moved him beyond the more internal spirituality of the Heart of Christ to a world that was beginning to develop beyond the confines of the Church. Fr. Dehon was interested in education, the social organization of society, the use of money, workers, politics. He wanted our eyes open to the world. It was Fr. Dehon who bought the daily newspaper for the communities where he lived!

How did starting the congregation help him to escape the sacristy? It seems at first sight to be a flight from diocesan priesthood. Why did he mean by: “I do not feel at home” in the diocesan priesthood?⁵ The future Pope John Paul I (1978) was deeply impressed by a statement of Fr. Dehon about the work of priests. In his writings he recalls Fr. Dehon saying:

The organization of our large parishes, he said, does not permit our clergy to carry out the apostolate. When our good priests have assisted at funerals, taken part in the offices, kept the registers up to date, their time and their activities are almost exhausted. One could live many centuries this way without rebuilding a Christian society. Everything has been organized on this level, and then one is amazed that people have ended by saying that religion is made for women and children. This pusillanimous generation has changed Christ for us. He is no longer the Christ of the workers, the Christ who practiced his apostolate among sinners, the

⁴ “J’avais pour ce genre de ministère la plus grande répugnance, mais je n’en fis rien voir.”

⁵ A statement at the end of his “Notes sur l’histoire de ma vie”. He made this remark in 1886 when he needed to justify his choices with regard to the beginnings of the Congregation.

*publicans and the men of the world. The Lion of Judah ... has become a timid sheep. Our Christ ... has changed into a weak man, who only speaks to children and the sick. Priests cannot remain enclosed in the sacristies and presbyteries (...). They have seen the apostasy of the whole of the people and all they have created are associations for girls.*⁶

With this in mind, Fr. Dehon throughout his life threw himself into in the political, economic and social world of his time. He was determined to do whatever he needed to do to gain back the worker of his time for the Church. For Dehon, his social (or societal) activity⁷ was a spiritual activity. In 1889 he began a periodical entitled « Le Règne du Cœur de Jésus dans les âmes et dans les sociétés » (The Reign of the Heart of Jesus in Souls and Societies) From this effort it became clear that for Dehon the social activities come forth not only out of his idea of the priest but also from his spiritual intuition about the “Heart” of Christ.

To have an idea of the extent of Fr. Dehon’s engagement of the social in his writings, you may want to compare his spiritual with the social writings. On the left we find the main spiritual works of Fr. Dehon, on the right, there is the list of his writings in the social field.

1887: La dévotion au Sacre Cœur de Jésus	1877: L’Éducation / L’Enseignement selon l’idéal chrétien
1896: La retraite du Sacré Cœur	1889: Le Règne du Cœur de Jésus dans les âmes et dans les sociétés
1900: Mois du Sacre Cœur de Jésus	1893: Manuel social chrétien
1900: Mois de Marie	1895: Usure au temps présent
1901: De la vie de l’amour envers le S.C. de Jésus	1889-1895: Œuvres sociales: Chronique du Règne
1905: Couronnes d’amour	1897: Nos Congrès
1907: Le Cœur sacerdotal de Jésus	1897: Les Directions Pontificales : politiques et sociales
1919: Vie intérieur. Ses Principes	1898: Catéchisme social
1919: Directoire spirituel	1897-1900: La Rénovation Sociale
1919: L’année avec le Sacre Cœur	1908: Le Plan des Franc-Maçonnerie en Italie et France (Le clef de l’histoire)
1920: Un prêtre du Sacre Cœur	
1922: Études sur le Sacré Cœur (2 vol)	

2. Towards a social spirituality

Catholics have always had a concern about the society in which they live. Their faith has made them sensitive to the contrasts between their faith and what is happening at the level of politics, economics, social policy, education, etc. They are aware that they carry a certain responsibility for what happens in their society. They are aware that in many of our societies it is not a Christian perspective that sets the agenda, but another. They think and say, “If only a Christian attitude would govern here.” That is also what Fr. Dehon said.

In the latter part of the 19th century Dehon became totally involved in the societal issues of his time. For him these were most operative in the political and economic fields. Hence his interest in

⁶ The text Albino Luciani quotes from is found in the *Christian Social Manual*. See “Leon Dehon, Priest, Apostle, Founder” Manuscript, p. 130.

⁷ Yves Ledure suggests that the word “social” does not adequately cover Dehon’s frame work. He uses the word “societal”. “Sociétal” is broader and covers better the level at which Dehon worked. Yves Ledure, *Le Code du Royaume*, p. 87, note 9.

education (he basically funded Collège Saint Jean) and in the plight of workers during the industrial revolution and the first stirrings of capitalism! Dehon had formed an inchoate idea of the different movements of his time. It is with these that he interacted, hoping to change their direction.

Spiritualities tend to focus on individuals and the story of their souls. Spirituality is then a tending to the interior spirit in its relationship with God. We have a difficult time connecting these inner stirrings – our spiritual vocation – with my relations with others. In the last session, we saw how for Jesus, the perfection of the Heavenly Father was almost exclusively translated in the way we are with others: how we respect them, how we do not lie, or call others names, etc. Most of these sayings of Jesus were at the personal level. They do not give us an indication how to become involved in political, social and economic movements.

And yet as Christians but also as followers of Fr. Dehon, we cannot block out from our spiritual life what happens on the political, social and economic levels. How can I be spiritual in doing economics, or being a politician? That's what Dehon began to surmise in the 1890s. He felt that he could only be spiritual if he also sought to get justice for the worker – child labour was still one of the mainstays of industry at the time of Dehon! There was much to be worried about at the end of the 19th century. New machines had begun to determine the speed with which one worked. The eight-hour work day did not yet exist. The Sunday day of rest was no longer respected. There was little protection against loss of limb or of life. There were many accidents in the factories, especially to young people. Safety was not a concern to the owners. The work in the factories was soul deadening. The human spirit could not breathe amidst the machines and the new thirst for wealth.

For Dehon to continue to work in the parish, teaching catechism, bringing communion to the sick, preparing for first communion, doing funerals was not unimportant but he did not see it as his work. He started a Congregation in order to get out of the sacristy and to become part of the movements where the real life of his time was to be found. And that was in the day-to-day toil for food, lodging, education, health. Most people in Saint Quentin found their lives totally dominated by the industrial revolution, by their work and by their struggle to make ends meet with low salaries. So that is where Dehon wanted to be – with the workers and their struggle to survive. For him it meant trying to influence the factory owners to take better care of their workers. But he soon realized that for many of these factory owners the spirit of capitalism had taken over. Throughout the greater part of his most active years, Fr. Dehon sought to understand what was happening all around him and to find solutions. For him it meant looking to see how the Heart of Christ could reign in society around him.

He blamed the French Revolution for setting free forces that were undermining the spiritual well being of people. He saw the social movements in his time as the major culprits why people were being enslaved by the machines. He was harsh in his criticism of them – perhaps at times too harsh. But what he wanted was a recognition among people of the merciful Heart of Christ that suffered all these indignities done to people.

When Pope Leo XIII seemed to comprehend the crisis of the time and wrote the first social encyclical *Rerum Novarum* (1891), Fr. Dehon was delighted. Here was finally a Church that went beyond the sacristy to the real issues that pre-occupied people: the rights and duties of capital and labour. *Rerum Novarum* is a landmark document which did not beat around the bush about the terrible living conditions of the nineteenth-century urban poor. Pope Leo was firm in his evaluation: "It is neither just nor humane so to grind men down with excessive labor as to stupefy their minds and wear out their bodies." Among the remedies to unrestricted capitalism Leo XIII advocated the

formation of trade unions and the introduction of collective bargaining, the condemnation of child labour, a just living wage. The pope encouraged Fr. Dehon to preach his encyclicals.

3. What did Fr. Dehon mean with a spirituality for societies

a. On the part of Fr. Dehon: his notion of “pure love”

What was the underlying spiritual force that made Fr. Dehon go in the direction of a social spirituality? It is not as if Dehon departed radically from his previous position. For him the devotion to the Sacred Heart had been a central motivating force in his life. However, in 1889 he began to speak not just about the devotion to the Sacred Heart but about the “reign of the Sacred Heart.” Some others in France had begun to use the same language but with Dehon it became an insistence. When he begins to write about in 1889, he asks, “Why talk about the reign of the Sacred Heart? Why this new name? Why this mystical doctrine?” (“Les opportunités du règne du Sacré Cœur”, in *RCJ* Feb. 1889 = ART-REV 8031001/1) And he answers a year later, “This reign of the Sacred Heart is nothing other than the reign of Jesus Christ but with a dominant nuance of love.” (“Notre but & notre programme”, in *RCJ*, Jan. 1890, p. 2-3)

This is an important insight. For Dehon the reign of the Sacred Heart of Jesus is the presence in our world and in the world of workers of Christ as charity.

In 1889 Dehon’s interest and engagement in things political and social became much more pronounced. In his *Le règne du Sacré Coeur dans les âmes et les sociétés* he gradually developed a way of combining the message of Paray-le-Monial – the reign of Christ in souls – with the reign of Christ in societies. He was awakened to this more social understanding through an inherent social and political dimension of the original message of Paray-le-Monial. In 1690, shortly before her death, Marguerite-Marie wrote a letter to Louis XIV to dedicate the kingdom of France to the Sacred Heart and to have the emblem of the Sacred Heart inscribed on the arms and standards of the French army. It is the first indication of the politicization of the devotion to the Sacred Heart. Dehon is not an innovator here in the sense that he was the first but he certainly was an important voice during this time of a dynamic spiritual movement in France that refused to accept the isolation of Catholic life from the social and economic engagement.⁸ How he envisaged this social spirituality becomes clear gradually in *Le règne*.

At a first glance, the tone and content of the devotion seems not to have changed. The content continued to swirl around the interior dispositions and actions of the devotion.⁹ Between 1889 and 1893 this begins to change.

He began to see an intimate connection between the interior devotion of the Sacred Heart, as he had practiced it, and its social impact. It was something new for him but also for others.

The major shift took place in 1893. Albert Bourgeois, a former superior general of the Congregation, calls 1893 the “année charnière”, the hinge year.¹⁰ Dehon is at this point at the height of his social activities and thinking.

⁸ D. Menozzi, *Sacro Cuore: Un culto tra devozione interior e restaurazione cristiana della società*, (Roma: Viella, 2001) points to Dehon as a classical example of this social turn. This shift is one indication of the vitality of Catholicism, despite its intransigence, not only in France but also in Belgium, Austria and Italy.

⁹ A. Bourgeois, “Le père Dehon” p. 40.

¹⁰ A. Bourgeois points to 1889-1892 as “a sort of progressive opening to the social as well as political dimension, which implied of necessity every engagement of the « kingdom ». “Le père Dehon et “le règne du Coeur de Jesus. 1893 – 1903” *Studia dehoniana SCJ* 25.2 (1994) p. 40.

During this time Dehon began to see the acts of reparation, the prayers, the acts of immolation and oblation of the devotion to the Sacred Heart not only as private acts but as a way in which the ills of the revolution, the terrible situation of workers in the new industrial age, could be overcome or healed. In other words, in 1893 he began to see the private acts of the devotion as a way to effect social change and transformation. In the notes for the retreat he made in 1893 – a very intense experience of the Ignatian exercises – it became clear that what he sought to insert into the social life of France was what, in the Ignatian exercises, is called “pure love.”¹¹

Pure love is a love that is given without any demand of a return. It is a pure gift. It is first of all God’s gift to us. Dehon wrote much about this love in his *Les Couronnes d’amour* published in 1905. The role of pure love in Dehon was a frequent topic during these important years as the main propellant of his vision. The Sacred Heart was for Dehon the primary image of this vision. Recalling a line of Saint Augustine, Dehon says, “Christ came above all so that humans would understand how much they are loved by God.” (CAM 1/50) What Dehon suddenly began to see was how this infinite love of God for humans as symbolized in the Heart of Jesus needed to enter into all the social, economic and political relations of humans. He is convinced that this insertion of the love of God in the Sacred Heart will transform social relations.

Pure love, as an image of God’s love but symbolized in the Heart of Jesus, was a love that asked for no return. Interestingly, this pure love is not translated into social action; For Dehon it remained an interior force. As Andrea Tessarolo writes: “For Fr. Dehon the reign of the Heart of Jesus is the presence of Christ as charity (Jesus/Caritas).”¹² That is why he considered his social work to be fundamentally operative at the moral and social level and not at the political level. He called for a “league of suppliants,” for public and private prayer, which he said was “the solution to the crisis we are experiencing.”¹³

What Fr. Dehon was after with pure love was not first of all an action on our part but God’s action, God’s love. This spirituality is not first of all a spirituality of justice, of active engagement of the social reality – although that is not excluded. It is first of all to let our faith in God’s love for me enter into all our activities, all our social engagements. At the end of the first part of the *Couronnes d’amour*, Dehon speaks of confidence. It is a confidence in the love that God has for me. It is with this confidence that we must enter into our day to day lives, in our work, in our families, in all our relationships. (CAM 1/50) Dehon reminds us there of the father who asks Jesus to help him and his child. Jesus says to him: “Do you believe? Do you trust? All is possible for those who believe.” (CAM 1/266)

b. On the part of the Church today

Our own time, a century and a half later, has experienced a greater and greater conflict between faith and modern culture. Much has happened since the 1870s. The world has suffered from the major ideologies that occupied people’s minds and hearts in the 19th and 20th centuries: capitalism, communism, fascism, neo-liberalism: all kinds of “isms” that poisoned people’s minds and actions. It would be easy and understandable if we would be totally negative about the state of the world.

¹¹ The retreat notes are found interspersed in *Le règne* (RSC) between 1898 and 1901 and in the *Oeuvres spirituelles 2* p. 9-172.

¹² A. Tessarolo, « Le regne social » p. 124.

¹³ A. Bourgeois, “*Le pere Dehon*” p. 41.

And yet, only 14 years after a most devastating world war, right when the cold war between a Soviet Russia and the United States was at its coldest, at a time dominated by nuclear weapons which for the first time in human history could destroy the earth, Pope John XXIII called a Council (1959). It was to be a council not to condemn but to open up the Church to modern times. John XXIII too sought to open the doors of the sacristy and let in the world. Pope John saw a world that many others did not see. He was actually positive about what it would mean for the Church to live in the modern world. And so, he carved out a new way: not of condemnation of the world but of being a welcome witness in the world. So how did Vatican II do what is also the deepest intuition of Fr. Dehon? Here are some examples:

- i. Most ecumenical councils in the history of the Church were called to overcome a threat to its unity. These councils expressed themselves by attaching a number of canons to the acts of the Councils. Most of these canons were negative: they condemned certain actions and beliefs as contrary to faith. Despite the crisis in which the Church might well have perceived itself to live, Vatican II knows no canons. There is no language of condemnation. Its language is the language of the gospel: a language of openness and hope – someone called it a “rhetoric of congratulations.”¹⁴
- ii. A Church that is open to the world: “The joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the people of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted, these too are the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the followers of Christ.” (*Gaudium et spes*, No. 1) What greater way can there be to say that the Church is open to humanity! Here the Council speaks of the call of Christians to act in the economic and political realities of countries as well as in the international institutions and organizations.
- iii. A Church that is open to other Christians: “This sacred Synod ... exhorts all the Catholic faithful to recognize the signs of the times and to participate skillfully in the work of ecumenism.” (*Unitatis Redintegratio*, No. 4) Here Catholics are urged to become part of a movement of Christians to speak with a unified voice to the world. Of Catholics it asks not be satisfied until Christians are one. Look beyond Catholicism of today toward a Church unified in Christ.
- iv. A Church that is open to other religions: “The Catholic Church rejects nothing which is true and holy in these religions. She looks with sincere respect upon those ways of conduct and of life, those rules and teachings which, though differing in many particulars from what she holds and sets forth, nevertheless often reflect a ray of that Truth which enlightens all people.” (*Nostra Aetate*, no. 2). Here the Church reaches out especially to the Jews, but also to Moslems, Hindus, Buddhists and other religions. She wishes us to search out what is true and holy everywhere!
- v. A Church that is open first of all to being the “people of God”: “By her relationship with Christ, the Church is a kind of sacrament or sign of intimate union with God, and of the unity of all humankind.” (*Lumen Gentium*, no. 1) “among all the nations of earth there is but one People of God, which takes its citizens from every race, making them citizens of a kingdom which is of a heavenly and not an earthly nature.” This is an image of a Church not of power, but as a sign of God’s desire to form a people according to God’s image.
- vi. A Church that is open to God’s revelation: “This present Council wishes to set forth authentic teaching about divine revelation and about how it is handed on, so that by hearing the message of salvation the whole world may believe; by believing, it may hope; and by hoping, it may

¹⁴ John O’Malley, « Developments, Reforms, and Two Great Reformations », in Ormond Rush, *Still Interpreting Vatican II. Some Hermeneutical Principles*, (New York: Paulist Press, 2004, p. 104, n. 7.

love.” (*Dei Verbum*, no.1) It is a Church that begins by listening, not to itself, but to a word that she holds to be God’s Word. As Church she wants to be always open to what she discerns as the will of God.

It is obvious from this brief introduction to a large part of the discussions of the Council that our eyes and our ears need to be open also to the big picture of the world. Our spirituality is one that has a place in its heart for all – despite the dark sides. It is in this direction that also Fr. Dehon wants to steer our spirituality as Lay Dehonians.

D. Testimony

Fr. Dehon was interested in the situation around him from the beginning of his apostolate in Saint Quentin. Just six weeks after arriving in Saint- Quentin in 1871, Fr. Dehon gave his famous Christmas day sermon from the high altar of the basilica. Like one of the classical Hebrew prophets, Leo Dehon excoriated the vapidness of the faith in his time. Here is what he has to say about the industrialists of his time:

Now let us consider the desire of the eyes, that is, the greedy and impassioned attachment to the goods of this world. This is indeed the queen of our society. It reaches its height at the Money Exchange where one man’s fortune is at the mercy of the stroke of the pen or the throw of the dice disguised under a game that was formerly forbidden but is now honored. [Dehon here refers to usury.] It holds sway in industry where irreligious capitalists exploit the worker and destroy his body, his soul and his eternity by imposing work on Sunday. ... It prevails among the workers who are unable to achieve the possession of capital by means of careful savings and a well-disciplined life, so they make feverish attempts to get it through social revolution and expropriation.¹⁵

Fr. Dehon exhibited a deep passion in his soul for the worker. As the text shows, already in his first year as a priest in 1871 he looked not just at the individual lives of Christians but also at the larger contexts in which the people at his time had to live. But he could be equally candid about the Church and its failures. In 1900 P. Dehon attended a congress in Bourges with priests who were interested in the social issues. This time, Dehon instead of turning an accusing eye at society, he demanded that the church allow itself to be questioned by society. It is good to remember when he said this. In 1900 the political clouds were gathering that led to the expulsion of religious from France in 1905 and the definitive separation of church and state, the so-called laws of laïcité (1905) when the French Government removed the possibility for religious men and women to become involved in schools and hospitals.¹⁶ Dehon “showed a surprising physical resistance, lots of imagination and humor, a real sense of initiative... and a constant interest in what he discovered.”¹⁷

¹⁵ “Sermon for Christmas Day: Father Leo Dehon 1871” Translated and Introduction by P.J. McGuire scj. (Franklin, WI, Dehon Study Center, 1995) p. 17-19 (cf. NHV 9/107).

¹⁶ Yves Ledure, *Le code du royaume*, (Clairefontaine : Heimat und Mission Verlag, 2012, p. 101.

¹⁷ See André Perroux, « Quelques réflexions sur sa personnalité » Manuscript : letter to John van den Hengel, p.12

E. Discussion and Sharing

- Begin with a general discussion about a spirituality that includes your whole life, your social involvements, your work. How is your work spiritual? What do you seek to accomplish with your work?
- Depending on the number of participants, divide the topics of the Vatican Council discussed under Part b above among the participants. Each participant (or smaller groups among the participants) select one of the topics from the documents of Vatican II and prepare a presentation to the others regarding its meaning for you. After a discussion in small groups, present your findings to the group.

Further practical applications

- Do an inventory of the members of your group about your work and/or activities. Explore in what ways your present work can take on also a greater involvement on the social level. What are the unexplored possibilities of what you are already doing?
- What volunteer work are you already involved in in your local community (parish, town/city, region)? Are you satisfied with what you are doing or should you redirect your energies in another direction?
- How do your involvements help you spiritually? How do they enter into your prayer life? Do they help you to grow in your love?
- Discuss among the members of the group whether, as a group, they want to undertake some common action (soup kitchen, volunteers at a local hospital, visiting of the sick, a neighbourhood or civic political action, etc.)

F. A moment of prayer

Song: O Sing to God a Joyful Song

O sing to God a joyful song,
Come, all on earth and join the throng.
Blest are you, Lord, our Creator.
You bring salvation day by day,
Both in our work and in our play.
Blest are you Lord, our Creator
Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia

Lord, all the nations praise your power.
They stand assembled in this hour.
Great are you Lord, king of nations.
Truth, power, and majesty, and fame,
Beauty, and glory form your name.
Great are you Lord, king of nations.
Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia

Let all creation burst in song,
Sea, field, and forest teeming throng:
We exalt you, living Savior.
Come, holy Lord, and judge the earth,
O come in judgment, bring new birth.
We exalt you, living Savior.
Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia.

Text: Fred R. Anderson (1986)

Tune: *Lasst uns erfreuen* (*Auserlesene Katholische Geistliche Kirchengesänge*, Cologne, 1623).

Introduction

During a particular examen (an examination of conscience at noon) at a Congress with priests in Lyon in 1893, Fr. Dehon asked the priests to reflect on this question: "Have you loved today's society enough so that you do not hold a sulking attitude towards it?" (OS IV, 577) That question is also addressed to us. Do we love this world enough, as God has loved this world?

The Word of God (Psalm 105)

O give thanks to the Lord, call on his name,
make known his deeds among the peoples.
Sing to him, sing praises to him;
tell of all his wonderful works.
Glory in his holy name;
let the hearts of those who seek the Lord rejoice.
Seek the Lord and his strength;
seek his presence continually.
Remember the wonderful works he has done,
his miracles, and the judgments he has uttered,
O offspring of his servant Abraham,
children of Jacob, his chosen ones.

He is the Lord our God;
his judgments are in all the earth.
He is mindful of his covenant forever,
of the word that he commanded, for a thousand generations,
the covenant that he made with Abraham,
his sworn promise to Isaac,
which he confirmed to Jacob as a statute,
to Israel as an everlasting covenant,
saying, "To you I will give the land of Canaan
as your portion for an inheritance."

When they were few in number,
of little account, and strangers in it,
wandering from nation to nation,
from one kingdom to another people,
he allowed no one to oppress them;
he rebuked kings on their account,
saying, "Do not touch my anointed ones;
do my prophets no harm."

When he summoned famine against the land,
and broke every staff of bread,
he had sent a man ahead of them,
Joseph, who was sold as a slave.
His feet were hurt with fetters,
his neck was put in a collar of iron;
until what he had said came to pass,
the word of the Lord kept testing him.
The king sent and released him;
the ruler of the peoples set him free.
He made him lord of his house,
and ruler of all his possessions,
to instruct his officials at his pleasure,
and to teach his elders wisdom.

Then Israel came to Egypt;
Jacob lived as an alien in the land of Ham.
And the Lord made his people very fruitful,
and made them stronger than their foes,
whose hearts he then turned to hate his people,
to deal craftily with his servants.
He sent his servant Moses,
and Aaron whom he had chosen.
They performed his signs among them,
and miracles in the land of Ham.
He sent darkness, and made the land dark;
they rebelled against his words.
He turned their waters into blood,
and caused their fish to die.
Their land swarmed with frogs,
even in the chambers of their kings.
He spoke, and there came swarms of flies,
and gnats throughout their country.
He gave them hail for rain,
and lightning that flashed through their land.

He struck their vines and fig trees,
and shattered the trees of their country.
He spoke, and the locusts came,
and young locusts without number;
they devoured all the vegetation in their land,
and ate up the fruit of their ground.
He struck down all the firstborn in their land, the first issue of all their strength.
Then he brought Israel out with silver and gold,
and there was no one among their tribes who stumbled.

He spread a cloud for a covering,
and fire to give light by night.
They asked, and he brought quails,
and gave them food from heaven in abundance.
He opened the rock, and water gushed out;
it flowed through the desert like a river.
For he remembered his holy promise,
and Abraham, his servant.
So he brought his people out with joy,
his chosen ones with singing.
He gave them the lands of the nations,
and they took possession of the wealth of the peoples,
that they might keep his statutes
and observe his laws.
Praise the Lord!

Abraham's faith

There are many stories of God's faithfulness to people, especially to Israel. They are stories that show God with all his power to be with a people, with a person. In his letter to the Congregation in 2015 to set up his program for his administration, Fr. Heiner Wilmer wrote about Abraham and how God interacted with him. He wrote:

"Go from your country, if you can!" - No, that is not what God said to Abraham. He did not say: "If you can!" He was clear, direct and unequivocal: "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you" (Gen 12.1) Do not hesitate. – This is about God's plan, not his own. This is about a new life, a new fortune, a life of blessings, blessings in abundance - for him and for others. Abraham is the believer who allows himself to be shaped by God, who has the courage to leave and to be a blessing for the people who are as numerous as the stars in the sky and the sand on the seashore. ...

Abraham - contemplative like a monk, faithful, courageous and bold, but also anxious and almost depressed at times, then humorous like a clown, merciful, active and effective, but also disbelieving, selfish, hesitating and reluctant and finally daring like a pirate, forceful, with open heart and expansive in the gift of his life. In this Abraham we see the image, which should serve us as an example."

A prayer: Fr. Dehon's Pact of Love (1883)

I give myself completely to our Lord
to serve him in all things and to do his will in all things.
I am ready to do and to endure whatever he wills,
with the help of his grace.
I have my Rule, my director, and the daily witness of providence
which tell me what I ought to do.
I renounce my own will and my liberty.
I beg our Lord to accept this offering, this gift that I make to him,
and never allow that I should take it back from him.
I call upon the most holy Virgin, my guardian angel, and my patron saints
to help me fulfill this pact all the days of my life. Amen.⁷

A moment of shared prayer

Give the participants a period of quiet time in which they can express in their own words what is happening in their hearts. Allow them to open up to the world and to their concerns for the environment, for peace, for faith. Also give time for exchange on the topic in a prayerful context.

Final hymn

[www.andiesisle.com/anirishblessing.html]

Pray an Irish Blessing – Watch the video and listen to the blessing

Literature

- Albert Bourgeois, *Le père Dehon et "Le Règne du Coeur de Jésus" 1893 – 1903* (STD 25.1+2) (Rome : Centre Général d'Études, 1994).
- John van den Hengel, "Crisis in Modernity: Léon Dehon and the Social Reign of the Sacred Heart", *SZfRuMW* 2016.

⁷ From Leo Dehon's Pact of Love (1883). See A. Perroux, *Leo Dehon: A Passion For Christ, A Passion For the World*. Translated by Paul J. McGuire. (Hales Corners and Toronto: Priests of the Sacred Heart, 2000) p. 113.

Meeting XXXIII **DEHON AND MERCY**

Objectives of the Meeting

- To enter into Fr. Dehon’s understanding of God’s mercy
- To explore God’s mercy in the context of Christian life
- To appropriate God’s mercy into our personal lives

Structure of the Meeting

In an interview in March 2016 the emeritus Bishop of Rome, Benedict XVI said “The concept of the mercy of God is becoming ever more a central and dominant concept: it is a sign of the time.” Pope Francis used the word mercy to symbolize his ministry. This evoked a great amount of reflection on the meaning of mercy. Also among Dehonians. The Congregation began to look at the use of mercy in the writings of Fr. Dehon. At the time, it was a surprise to discover that for Fr. Dehon mercy was indeed a central concept.

For this reason we will explore in this theme the way that Fr. Dehon speaks of mercy. From there this theme will seek to enter more deeply into the concept of mercy in order to understand better how central this notion of mercy is for Christian life and for our living out of the Charism of Fr. Dehon.

Development of the Meeting

A. Welcome

After warmly welcoming the members and the exchange of information, the participants are invited to explore the notion of mercy. Where have they encountered the word mercy in their lives? What do they understand by the word mercy? Have they had a personal experience of mercy (God’s mercy, mercy from another human being)? What do they understand mercy to be?

A word from the Bible (Psalm 103)

“Bless the Lord, O my soul,
And all that is within me,
Bless his holy name.
Bless the Lord, O my soul,
And do not forget all his benefits –
Who forgives all your iniquity,
And heals all your diseases,
Who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy
And satisfies you with good as long as you live
So that your youth is renewed like the eagle’s.

A word from Fr. Dehon

“In his goodness, God not only refrains from punishing the sinner who offends him, but he even lavishes all sorts of blessings on him ... He lets his sun shine on the sinner as well as those who are just; he sends the blessing of rain on his fields (Mt 5.45). God seems to share his favors equally with those who love him and those who offend him.” (RSC 77)

B. Reflection on the theme

1. Mercy in Dehon’s writings

“Miséricorde” (the French word for “mercy”) is a frequently used word in the writings of Léon Dehon. The new research instrument on the writings of Fr. Dehon in the Centro Studi in Rome, *Dehondocs*, shows us that in his thus far published writings, Dehon uses the word “miséricorde” (mercy in French) 1,048 times (plus 95 times the Latin, *misericordia*, 203 times *miséricordieux*). The main texts in which Dehon speaks of mercy are in his meditations of Couronnes d’Amour, Rétraite du Sacré-Coeur, Mois du Sacré-Coeur, Directoire spirituel, and Études sur le Sacré-Cœur de Jésus. In each of these writings, he has extensive sections or meditations on mercy. It is obvious that for Fr. Dehon mercy is a central word. In fact, he uses it more often than the word “reparation”.

Fr. Dehon uses the word mercy in many contexts. For instance, he often prays for mercy for France because he was deeply concerned about the political and economic direction France had taken. Mercy is also a word that he attaches frequently to the name of God. He calls God the God of mercy, and the Sacred Heart as the abyss or symbol of mercy. He also calls Mary the mother of mercy. Although these usages were customary for his time, they do not tell us much about Fr. Dehon’s meaning of the word. However, there are three usages that show what Fr. Dehon found important about mercy. These we will explore in this theme.

1. The first, most common usage of mercy is in conjunction with **forgiveness or pardon for sin**. For Dehon, mercy is what annihilates sin, overcomes sin. What is understood here is the power of God’s mercy to change the condition of the sinner from being “lost”, “condemned” or “excluded” to being “saved.” In other words, mercy changes a person from being a sinner to being “in grace.” As a first indication of mercy, it is clear that mercy changes a situation for a person.
2. The second important use of the word mercy occurs in Dehon’s reflection on **God’s actions**. God for Dehon is primarily a God of mercy. Dehon calls mercy the “The most highly acclaimed attribute of God.” (RSC 72) In this context, mercy in Dehon is frequently accompanied by words that speak of “excess.” Mercy is said to be “inexhaustible,” “inexplicable,” “infinite”. In other words, mercy connotes the excess or superabundance in God. It is in this way that God’s mercy is connected with God’s humility/humiliation, God’s self-annihilation, God’s suffering. It is the ultimate face of God in whom Dehon trusts. Mercy is the overriding attribute which refigures the other divine attributes such as God’s justice. God’s justice is not a strict legal justice, but a merciful justice. Mercy one might say is the true face of God’s justice. How does God show this attribute? Dehon says that God shows and chooses mercy by humiliating self, by making sacrifices, by suffering. It is as if God is desperate to show mercy and God does so by self-denial, that is, by ciphering himself away, by self-annihilation, by humility. For Dehon the moment of this *kenosis* of God is the

Incarnation of which the Sacred Heart is the symbol (MSC 385; ESC 1/424). As Dehon says in his Retreat of the Sacred Heart, “Through self-denial God chooses to suffer to show mercy.” (see RSC 75) However, Jesus remains the center of the revelation of God’s mercy. In his life, in his encounter with people, particularly in his miracles, Jesus is the manifestation of the mercy of God for people.

3. A third use of the word mercy in Dehon touches on the effect that mercy has upon those who receive it. Mercy opens the capacity in humans to be merciful to others. One of the more beautiful sayings of Dehon on mercy is a word that he puts in the mouth of God: “je veux aider votre miséricorde” (RSC 315) — “I want to help your mercy”. The effusion of God’s mercy allows us to show mercy to others — “taking on all the sufferings of our brothers.” (CAM 1/250) It is the foundation for our “compassion for the infirmities of our brothers.” (CAM 1/253)

2. Mercy: a sign of our time

If it is true that mercy is an important concept in Dehon’s spirituality, how can we live this mercy in the 21st century? To do that we must make two preliminary remarks on how we might understand mercy today. We can then return to Fr. Dehon and expand on his notion of mercy for us today.

a. *The power of the word mercy as a sign of our time.*

What did the emeritus Bishop of Rome, Benedict XVI, mean when he said that mercy is a sign of the time? Even though the word mercy entered with renewed force into our language through Sr. Faustina and her devotion to Divine Mercy, and in Pope John Paul II’s *Dives in Misericordia*, it took off with Pope Francis. He made it into one of these words that fits this time. Language and words have always had a particular power to shape our lives. We are reminded how poets go through major contortions to find a correct word in a poem. For instance, a poet like Emily Dickinson in one case in a rough draft of a poem considered thirteen possible adjectives for a single noun. Why did she do so? For the poet finding such a word is not without consequence. A poet begins with a vision, a unique way of seeing the world or a certain reality and to say that vision demands that the poet find that one word that will adequately speak that vision. No other word will do. At the end, Emily Dickinson had to decide that only one of these words would reveal what she had seen.¹⁸

The Bishop emeritus of Rome, Benedict XVI thinks that mercy is such a word for our time. He called mercy a “sign of our time”. It means that mercy is that one word that best expresses what is happening between God and humans at this time. Is mercy a word that can “remake” the self, remake the world, remake the Church in our time? Does mercy reveal an authentic vision for our time that only this word can enunciate? That is what we need to explore.

b. *Mercy as a word of appeal*

If mercy is one of these words that is able to remake the world and ourselves today, then we need to think about what kind of word mercy is and about what sort of reality it is speaking. Mercy is not a word that gives us a new information about God. It is not as if with this word we learn something about that we previously did not know. However, it is a word that very powerfully brings God into the midst of our daily concerns. In other words, the word mercy

¹⁸ Helen Vendler in *New York Review of Books*, March 10 2016, p. 40.

gives us not a theoretical information but a practical one. When the Hebrew scriptures speak to us of God's mercy as infinite, they realize that we cannot ever imagine what it means. It is totally beyond our capacity. As Moses learned at the burning bush from God was that "You cannot see my face and live." (Ex 33.20) If seeing God is beyond our human capacity, where else can we turn to encounter this God and so making us capable to live? God directs Moses to go back to Egypt in order to do something about the "cries of my people." (Ex) He wanted Moses to listen with God to a people in slavery so that in the name of God he may set them free.

We, like Moses, encounter the God of mercy when, as the Jewish philosopher Levinas said, we encounter human beings who in their plight, in their misery, make us responsible for the other. God's mercy is a very practical concept. We encounter it in the face and eyes of the refugees fleeing the absolute misery of their country, we see in the eyes of the beggar who puts out his hands and says to us, "a bit of change, please." Mercy is a word that summons us, calls us to respond but in a manner that is never enough. When have we done enough for the poor who call upon us? That is what mercy does to us. It summons us to be responsibility for the other, like a true disciple of Jesus. It is a word of a master who appears to us in the form of a beggar calling us. In this sense too, mercy is an unusual word. We feel the tug of this mercy when in our time we are overwhelmed by the refugee crisis. In all its immensity and tragedy, what we feel in our heart and spirit is indeed the tug of God's mercy. God is making us responsible for them. That is the work of God's mercy.

In the Letter for the Feast of the Sacred Heart (2016) by the Superior General, Fr. Heiner Wilmer, said that migration is also the touchstone for God's mercy at this time. He asks that

"In our parishes, schools, universities, in education and formation institutes, in our social works, in whatever areas that we have influence on public opinion, let us make migration our theme. We are convinced that every confrere can do something. Every community has an opportunity to do something creative... never in our history have there been so many people on the road, searching for new life, as at the outset of the 21st century... Fr. Dehon tuned up his sensitivities so as to be able to feel the heartbeat of Jesus in order to make Jesus' heartbeat his own and to make Jesus' vision his own... What the Industrial Revolution meant for Fr. Dehon at the end of the 19th century is similar to what migration means for us at the beginning of the 21st century. As Dehonians we see migration as the greatest challenge of our times."

Mercy is an important fish in our pond. We should be known as being neighbours, like the good Samaritan who found a wounded person in the ditch and helped him with such excessive abundance. We should be known as men of compassion, people of mercy. From such experiences in our life we can read back into the infinity of Abba God and receive an inkling of how Abba God's selfhood lies in Abba's self-gift to the other — the Son — and through the Son in the Holy Spirit. Here is a God who makes space in himself for the other, who lets go of self — expressed in the important word "kenosis" — so that the other might be. It is what the cross has symbolized for Christianity: the cross as the image of God's self-gift to the other to the point of death. Walter Kasper defined mercy somewhat awkwardly as "the visible and efficacious side of God as charity toward the outside." (p.136) Mercy is the dance of love in God to the outside as a summons or a response to human misery.

c. *Mercy and pardon*

The miracle of mercy for Fr. Dehon is first of all manifested in the forgiveness of sins. It is in the forgiveness of sins that Dehon uses the word mercy most frequently. Dehon has some beautiful words about the power of God's mercy that is able to forgive.

"In his goodness, God not only refrains from punishing the sinner who offends him, but he even lavishes all sorts of blessings on him... He lets his sun shine on the sinner as well as those who are just; he sends the blessing of rain on his fields [Matthew 5:45]. God seems to share his favors equally with those who love him and those who offend him." (RSC 77)
"His mercy is an abyss. Neither the denials of St. Peter, nor the crimes of the thief, nor the weakness of Magdalene were insufficient for him. It bursts forth all through the Gospel. Was his goodness to the sinner not a scandal for the Pharisees?" (CAM 1/233)

Fr. Dehon is very much aware of the power of mercy and the excess of mercy in relationship to forgiveness. He realizes that sin or the fault paralyzes the power to act of someone who normally is a "capable being." I lose something of my human capability to act. It leads to "the feeling of loss of one's own wholeness."¹⁹ Forgiveness then is the lifting of this existential incapacity. (457) Pardon restores my capacity to act. It is clear that there is a deep disproportion between what I did in the fault and the pardon I receive for what I did. The pardon does not come from the same source as the fault. Pardon comes only as a gift. The scriptures speak of the hymn of joy that comes from pardon. The sinner goes home dancing for joy, he or she calls the neighbors and with tears in his eyes and says, "What I lost, I have found again." That is why we say only God forgives. It is not ours to give. For this reason, there is a vertical asymmetry between fault that must be avowed and the pardon that comes to me as a liberating gift.

In meditating on the various stories of repentant sinners in the gospels, the prodigal son, the Samaritan woman, Matthew, the good thief, Dehon is very much aware of this vertical asymmetry. He marvels at the extravagance of mercy in the welcoming of the sinner. He wants the person meditating to see the impatience of the father "waiting for the prodigal son, how he places himself before him and falls around his neck and feasts his return." (RSC 295) He speaks of a "goodness without measure." (RSC 295), how God forgets the sin and overwhelms the sinner with grace. (RSC 297) But the gift of forgiveness comes from God. It is a gift of mercy inasmuch as it is God who looks into the eyes of the sinner and sees there the appeal of the sinner to be restored in his or her capacity to act. Mercy restores me.

Between the fault and its pardon there is no logic. There is only the mystery of pardon, the mystery of mercy. Mercy is a love for the other so deep that it takes on oneself what the other has done against me.

In his hymn of love, Paul goes to the very core of this experience of love. His poem of love sings how love can break through to a new realm. Love breaks through to the very place where we impute things to ourselves, where we form ourselves or are formed. Love gives it a new orientation. Love includes everything, even the unforgivable, even the enemy. As Jesus said: You must not forgive once. You must forgive seventy-seven times. (Mt 18.22) There is no upper limit; the exigency is infinite, as God is infinite. No fault too great, but it is open to pardon.

¹⁹ Paul Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting* p. 460.

Fr. Dehon is deeply aware of the power of mercy in forgiveness. Mercy, God's mercy, is powerful. It is power that is able to recreate us. With pardon something new surfaces into our life. As he writes in his *Mois du Sacré-Cœur* : "It is your mercy which you brought as I was waiting and seeking to save my life, when I was in your disgrace. It enlightened me by inviting me to do penance in order to receive pardon. It gave me sorrow for my sins and the desire to love you. And now I have the confidence that as a result of mercy, I am in grace with you." (MSC 247). A beautiful phrase: "I am in grace with you." That is why we call it "for-giveness" or we call it "par-don". Pardon means "as a gift", just like "for-give" (Interesting how language seeks to say this reality: its root is "give / gift). We do not undo, we do not forget, we forgive.)

In other words, there exists a force that breaks through to what I have done. It does not undo what was done. But it refuses to identify me with what I have done. It tells me that *I am more than what I have done*. Forgiveness taps into that something more. Mercy is what annihilates sin, overcomes sin. It changes the condition of being a sinner, from being "lost", "condemned" or "excluded", to being "saved", "included". It changes me. Mercy makes me to be "in grace." "In grace" means that I live out of a gift, an absolutely free gift. Christians call it "to be saved." I am the recipient of a gift and that gift is now my identity, who I am. Dehon may not have understood how mercy accomplishes this — we probably don't either. Nor did he know what it would mean for the person to be the recipient of mercy, although, like us, he has felt forgiveness.

d. *God's mercy manifested in Jesus*

Above it was said that the major manifestation of God's mercy was in God's self-abasement, God's humility in the Incarnation and in the cross. Here God showed himself. But Dehon also suggests that we can see God's mercy in the miracles of Jesus. He makes much of the saying in the gospel: "And Jesus had compassion or mercy on the sick and healed many." In the gospels, he tells us, God's mercy is connected with the healing of the sick, with the poor, with the excluded, the psychologically disturbed. In the Gospels these deeds of power are essential for our understanding of Jesus. These miracles, Dehon says, are acts of God's mercy. In several of his meditations, Fr. Dehon takes us along in his stories of the miracles of Jesus.

Dehon was right. We can read it in Mark's gospel. The Jesus of Mark does not have a plan for his ministry. The gospel begins with five pericopes. In each story, Jesus finds himself confronted by a situation: he is confronted with a paralytic, he meets Levi the tax collector, he meets with the disciples of John and is confronted with their fasting, he has to answer for his disciples who were so free as to pluck grain on the Sabbath, he meets a man with a withered hand on a Sabbath. In every case Jesus responds to a human situation. It seems that Jesus is learning the way of the kingdom by each time responding to a human situation. He looks these humans in the face and he does what mercy does. He heals, he forgives, he interprets God's mercy. The ultimate face of God is inscribed in what Jesus experienced in the faces of the people he encountered. That is the way of the kingdom.

We have many such stories. Jesus consistently does the unexpected.

The wedding feast at Cana (John 2) is a perfect example. It starts as an ordinary wedding feast. But the couple ran out of wine. And here compassion, mercy, responds. Mary goes to Jesus to ask him to intervene. And suddenly what was ordinary, becomes a sign of God's extraordinary. The wine of the ordinary wedding was consumed. Jesus instructs the servants to take the six

jars, to fill them to the brim with water and take this new water to the steward. The six jars contained 30 gallons of water each. God's mercy read in the awkward situation of the couple makes Jesus change the water into wine. What stands out in the story is not only the change of water into wine, but its extraordinary surplus! The six jars contained the equivalent of more than 800 bottles of wine. It is with this image of response to a need and extraordinary surplus that John begins to tell the story of Jesus. It is presented as a sign — a sign of the light and the life that comes through Jesus. The ordinary gets broken through with the extraordinary. But the extraordinary is no longer an exception: it is the gospel.

We see this mercy at work throughout the ministry of Jesus. He breaks through all the barriers that seem to keep us in the ordinary. The kingdom of God, he tells us, uses an overflowing measure. As he told us in the parable of the sower: there is a measure of 30, a measure of 60, and even a measure of a hundredfold. Mercy has to do with a lack, a need and a response of surplus, with superabundance, of excess to our lacks, to our failures. When reality is touched by God's mercy, it runs over with abundance. This is the measure of the kingdom, Jesus says, "A good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over." That the kingdom "will be put into your lap." (Luke 6.38) This is the measure of God's mercy.

God's mercy, his compassion, could not leave people, the weak, the sick, the alienated, even the dead, in their situation. We are given stories in which God trounced death, how he raised the daughter of Jairus, how he brought back Lazarus because he loved him. Compassion takes over. They show that when needy reality, the sick, the hungry, the suffering, the dead come in touch with this mercy, mercy's force transforms this needy reality, recreating it into the kingdom of God. It does not do so automatically, that is why there is still much misery in the world, but it becomes operative when there is a deep trust in God. Faith is its condition: a deep bond between this generative love that is God's triune self and the human being. We, Dehonians, should know this trust for it is at the heart of our charism. Fr. Dehon, we know, based his life on a trust in the mercy and love of God for himself and he asks us to do the same.

e. *The gift in return*

The final question is whether mercy implies a reciprocity or an exchange from the recipient?

It is not enough to contrast the penitent's admission of the fault with the extravagance of the gift of forgiveness. As stated earlier, there is a disproportion between the fault and forgiveness. In forgiveness the excess of mercy overwhelms the lowly confession of guilt. It allows the one making the confession to regain the capacity to act. However, the extravagance of forgiveness is so disproportionate to the request for forgiveness that the recipient of forgiveness must in some way deal with the excess of the gift. In this way mercy comes in the form of an appeal, a summons to us to assume responsibility for the other.

However, the appeal of the summons is as infinite as the ground from which it came. In other words, the gift in return, cannot measure up to the excess of the gift. The excess of the demand says something about the kingdom of God. The love of enemies in all its impossibility for humans is an image of the excess of God. If, nonetheless, it summons me, I can only respond with the capacity that is in me. It will never be enough. Great saints have made us aware of what it means to live the impossible as a gift. Dehon and the tradition of the spirituality of the Heart of Christ has called this appeal to love in return "redamatio," a loving in return, even a loving on behalf of those who refuse to love. This love of the enemy is an adequate response to the height

of forgiveness because only from the enemy one expects no return. Love of enemy is never a commandment. It is forever an image of the impossible possible. Ultimately, mercy asks one to live in an economy of the gift.

Mercy, in other words, can only be answered with extravagance, with unlimited generosity or abundance... or with thanksgiving. Hence, with Eucharist one joins the extreme generosity of the self-gift of Jesus through an act of thanksgiving of the community and in the eating of the bread.

C. Testimony

Give the participants a time to reflect on the notion of mercy. It might be helpful if we give them the following discussion starters.

- (1) *"I am uncomfortable thinking of myself as merciful, because..."*
- (2) *"A time when I felt that God gave me a great gift was when..."*
- (3) *"I know that God wants me to be merciful and compassionate in my work, but it is difficult because..."*
- (4) *"One of the biggest struggles I have at work is trying to be an instrument of God's love when I am faced with..."*
- (5) *"My life feels comfortable, and don't always know what to do when someone asks for money because..."*
- (6) *"My greatest experience of what I can only call a miracle was when..."*

D. A Moment of Prayer

After the testimony gather for prayer. If possible form a circle. Together alternating recite Psalm 103.

Bless the Lord, O my soul,
and all that is within me, bless his holy name.
Bless the Lord, O my soul,
and do not forget all his benefits—
who forgives all your iniquity,
who heals all your diseases,
who redeems your life from the Pit,
who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy,
who satisfies you with good as long as you live
so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's.

The Lord works vindication
and justice for all who are oppressed.
He made known his ways to Moses,
his acts to the people of Israel.

The Lord is merciful and gracious,
slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.
He will not always accuse,
nor will he keep his anger forever.
He does not deal with us according to our sins,
nor repay us according to our iniquities.

For as the heavens are high above the earth,
so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him;
as far as the east is from the west,
so far he removes our transgressions from us.

As a father has compassion for his children,
so the Lord has compassion for those who fear him.
For he knows how we were made;
he remembers that we are dust.
As for mortals, their days are like grass;
they flourish like a flower of the field;
for the wind passes over it, and it is gone,
and its place knows it no more.

But the steadfast love of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting on those who fear him,
and his righteousness to children's children,
to those who keep his covenant
and remember to do his commandments.

The Lord has established his throne in the heavens,
and his kingdom rules over all.

Bless the Lord, O you his angels,
you mighty ones who do his bidding,
obedient to his spoken word.
Bless the Lord, all his hosts,
his ministers that do his will.
Bless the Lord, all his works,
in all places of his dominion.
Bless the Lord, O my soul.

As the prayer of Psalm 103 comes to an end, invite the participants in a mode of intercession to name the persons for whom they petition God for mercy or to name the situations in our society and world that require the merciful presence of God.

- Walter Kasper, *Mercy. The Essence of the Gospel and Key to Christian Life* (Mahwah: Paulist Press, 2013); Mark-David Janus (ed), *Crossing the Threshold of Mercy: A Spiritual Guide for the Extraordinary Jubilee Year of Mercy* (Mahwah: Paulist Press, 2015)

Meeting XXXIV

PARTICIPATING IN THE REIGN OF CHARITY AND JUSTICE

Objectives of the Meeting

- To understand the inner will of Fr. Dehon to cooperate with the establishment and growth of the reign of the Heart of Jesus in society: a reign of justice, charity, and compassion especially for the lowly and for those who suffer in our world.
- To live the spirituality of the Sacred Heart and the Dehonian value of justice and love overflowing with apostolic zeal and commitment with social dimensions.

Structure of the Meeting

The reign of the Sacred Heart in the souls and in the society represents the third thread that unite the fundamental elements of the charism of Fr. Dehon, namely, *ecce venio*, *sint unum*, and *adveniat regnum tuum*.

“Your kingdom come,” expresses the “passion for the reign” (*zèle passionné*) that makes God’s love to be known and to reign effectively in the hearts, “in the souls and in the society,” to establish the reign of justice and Christian charity in the world (cf. Souvenirs XI = LCC 8090139/42-49; Const. 30).

The Dehonian charism puts us into a greater solidarity with people’s lives in order to be an effective sign that the Kingdom of God and His justice should be a priority in our life, knowing that “the building up of human society may always have its foundation in the Lord and have him as its goal: otherwise, those who build it may have labored in vain” (LG 46; cf. Const. 38).

Development of the Meeting

A. Welcome

Begin the meeting with a warm greeting and give the participants an opportunity to speak about events that have occurred in their personal lives but also in their community or country. The aim of the meeting is to discover with one another a desire of Fr. Dehon for the establishment of a reign of justice, love and compassion. Ask the participants if there is anything that has been in the news of late that touches on the issue of justice and charity. Engage in a brief discussion.

A word from the Bible (2 Cor 8.1-8; 9.6-11)

8¹ Now, brethren, we wish to make known to you the grace of God which has been given in the churches of Macedonia, ²that in a great ordeal of affliction their abundance of joy and their deep poverty overflowed in the wealth of their liberality. ³For I testify that according to their ability, and beyond their ability, they gave of their own accord, ⁴begging us with much urging for the favor of participation in the support of the saints, ⁵and this, not as we had expected, but they first gave themselves to the Lord and to us by the will of God. ⁶So we urged Titus that as he had previously made a beginning, so he would also complete in you this gracious work as well.

⁷But just as you abound in everything, in faith and utterance and knowledge and in all earnestness and in the love we inspired in you, see that you abound in this gracious work also. ⁸I am not speaking this as a command, but as proving through the earnestness of others the sincerity of your

love also. ⁹ For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ that though He was rich, yet for your sake He became poor, so that you through His poverty might become rich...

⁹ ⁶ Now this I say, he who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. ⁷ Each one must do just as he has purposed in his heart, not grudgingly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. ⁸ And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that always having all sufficiency in everything, you may have an abundance for every good deed; ⁹ as it is written,

*“He scattered abroad, he gave to the poor,
His righteousness endures forever.”*

¹⁰ Now He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness; ¹¹ you will be enriched in everything for all liberality, which through us is producing thanksgiving to God.

A word from Fr. Dehon

“The reign of the Heart of Jesus in the society is the reign of justice, charity, mercy, and compassion for the lowly, the humble, and those for those who suffer. I am asking to dedicate yourself to all these works, to encourage them and to cooperate with them. Support those institutions which can contribute to the reign of social justice and which defend the weak against oppression by the powerful.” (RSC 610)

B. Reflection on the theme

1. Fr. Dehon’s slogan: *Adveniat regnum tuum*

“Fr. Dehon was very sensitive to the sin which weakens the Church especially when consecrated persons are involved. He was aware of social evils; he had carefully studied their human causes, both individual and social. But he saw the refusal of the love, he wanted to respond to it by being intimately united to the Heart of Christ and by restoring His Reign in individuals and in society” (Cst. 4).

As a priest called upon to preach and write, Fr. Dehon soon began to speak out; clearly and forcefully he spoke his mind and would not keep silent. His first Christmas sermon (1871)²⁰ was a meditation on the Poor Child in the manger in which he denounced the worship of money: “Godless capitalist are exploiting the worker and are destroying his body, his soul, and his eternity... often without giving him an adequate share of the profits earned by his sweats.” “This society is rotten and all the workers’ claims are well founded. The current regime is evil, unjust, and menace to society.” And he became actively involved. He took direct action to remedy the iniquities he encountered, he arranged meetings with the leading employers, and he displayed remarkable skill in shaping and motivating public opinion by making people aware of their responsibilities. “Our principal purpose in conducting retreats is the apostolate of the worker by the worker. The apostolate among management is often ineffective, but retreats make the worker and apostle, and one soon becomes a legion.” These words, dating from 1889, would prove to be prophetic. That same year he launched his magazine *The Reign* in which he calls for “the participation and the initiative of the workers themselves,”²¹ and this could come about only through a sound education

²⁰ See NHV 9/105-109.

²¹ “La question sociale”, in *RCJ* [April 1889], pp. 159-162 = ART-REV 8031002/9.

and the formation of a sense of solidarity throughout of the whole of society. (A. Perroux, *Leo Dehon: A Passion For Christ, A Passion For the World*, 2000).²²

2. Attentive to the appeals of the world:

*Is there nothing to do? Everything is to be done!*²³

Let's receive this good news of love, in the light of the life of Fr. Dehon. A man, a priest and religious entirely consecrated to serve the Reign of this love in diverse ways. An apostle imbued by a sincere and generous zeal that allow him to be attentive to the appeals of his times; a person interested for the political and social reality; competent, and clairvoyant; devoted to formation, and ready to enface challenges of the culture. A man yearning for work, creative, courageous, and persevering to carry on his initiatives. And above all a man filled by *zeal of heart*; filled by this love that suffers because the sin and its dreadful consequences in the society, the church, and in the "consecrated persons" (Cst. 4); a zeal that intensifies its commitment of love and reparation.

Welcomed in this way the example of Fr. Dehon, everybody could easily perceive how this passion for the Reign of love could assume *different manners*, and adapt to variably circumstances, and times. How this zeal is able to unify a life entirely offered to Christ.

It comes to us from our Founder, and a very much precise context (Congrès de Bourges, 1900). There is a question that we could repeat with profit in any of our actual situations: "What to say about zeal? In face of difficulties of this kind, did we lose courage? Have we ever say these word of disloyalty: Is there nothing to do? When everything is to be done! (*Œuvres sociales*, Vol. IV, 564-565).

3. An act of charity and an expression of unity

Paul gives some ideas on sharing and equality in the Christian community. We are told in the Acts that the church at Antioch in Syria sent Paul and Barnabas to Jerusalem with material relief (Acts 11:27-30). Later, Paul organized a relief project for Jerusalem among the churches he had evangelized and founded. Paul not only urges the churches to give help but also lays out the deeper meaning of this exercise. It is both an act of charity and an expression of unity between the churches (see: 1Cor 8 and 9).

In encouraging the Corinthians to be generous he puts before them the extreme generosity of the churches in Macedonia. "We want you to know of the **grace** of God that has been given to the churches of Macedonia..." The central theme of his message is expressed by the Greek noun *charis*, which is usually translated as 'grace' but also by terms like 'favor', 'gracious act', 'gracious favor' etc.

'Grace' can be described as 'the experience of being loved by God' or 'God's love tangibly experienced'. It may come as a direct gift from God or through another person or through some blessing which comes into my life. A closely related term is *eu-charis-tia*, normally translated as 'thanksgiving', that is, thanksgiving for the 'graces' received from God in so many ways but especially in the saving work of Jesus.

²² A. Perroux, *Leo Dehon: A Passion For Christ, A Passion For the World*. Translated by Paul J. McGuire. (Hales Corners and Toronto: Priests of the Sacred Heart, 2000), 40-41.

²³ A. Perroux, *Une Pratique Pastorale Inspirée de notre Spiritualité*. *Studia Dehoniana* 18 (Rome: Centro Studi Dehoniani, 1987), 32-33.

“...for in a severe *test* of affliction, the *abundance* of their [i.e. the Macedonians] joy and their profound poverty overflowed in a wealth of *generosity* on their part.”

Three key words appear in this sentence:

Test (dokime) suggests being tried and found genuine.

Abundance: a word containing the idea of overflowing and excelling.

Generosity: the word *haplotēs* has nuances which include both simplicity and sincerity. Here it designates singleness of purpose that manifests itself in generous giving.

The Macedonians have asked Paul insistently that they wanted to offer what they could spare and even more than they could afford in order to express their solidarity with their Christian brothers and sisters who were worse off than themselves. Paul emphasizes the spontaneity of the Macedonians and the nature of their action. In this they were showing a true Christian spirit, where the community's resources are shared with those in need. (It seems that the Corinthians are not quite so spontaneous, instead they need some pushing.)

The idea that there should be rich churches and poor churches was unacceptable and contrary to the spirit of the Gospel.

“They [the Macedonians] gave themselves first to the Lord and to us through the will of God.” On the deepest level their attitude is one of self-giving and solidarity with their brothers and sisters.

4. The example of Jesus' generosity

Now, Paul hopes that the Christians of Corinth there will match the generosity of the Macedonians and even more. “*We urged Titus that, as he had already begun, he should complete for you this gracious act also.*” The Corinthians are rich in many things, Paul tells them, perhaps with a taint of flattery, but he wants to emphasize that their wealth will not be complete until they are also rich in giving. “*You have always the most of everything – of faith, of eloquence, of understanding, of keenness for any cause, and the biggest share of our affection – so we expect you to put the most into this work of mercy too.*”

Paul is not ordering them to give but, by giving the example of the Macedonians, is offering them a challenge and a test of the genuineness of their faith and love. The Apostle offers the Corinthians the example of Jesus in a beautiful turn of phrase which we could do well to pray over today: “*Remember how generous the Lord Jesus was: he was rich but he became poor for your sake, to make you rich out of his poverty.*” We think e.g. on Jesus incarnation and death (Phil 2:6-8).

In our own day we again think of people who enriched many of others through his or her poverty and his or her freedom from any personal possessions.

5. “Whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully”

Paul continues his exhortation to the Corinthians to be generous (2 Cor. 9:6-11). He presents a kind of proverb: skimpy sowing means skimpy reaping. “*Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully.*”

He further adds that each one should make their donation according to what has been agreed but to do it without a long face or under a sense of compulsion. “*God loves a cheerful giver.*” As the *Imitation of Christ* says, It is the love of the giver more than the gift of the lover that counts.

And Paul further adds that the Source of everything we have will reward us generously for our generosity because he is, in fact, the original source of all that we give. “*God is able to make every grace abundant for you, so that in all things, always having all you need, you may have an abundance for every good work.*” So that the more we receive, the more we are able to share with others.

The behavior to which he exhorts them is based on God’s own way of acting. God is capable of overwhelming generosity, as the quotation below attests, so that they need not fear being short. He will provide in abundance, both supplying their natural needs and increasing their inner goodness. Paul challenges them to a God-like generosity and reminds them of the fundamental motive for encouragement: God himself cannot be outdone.

He then quotes Psalm 112: “*He scatters abroad, he gives to the poor; his righteousness endures forever.*” For “*the One who supplies seed for the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed and increase the harvest of your good deeds.*”

In other words, “*you are being enriched in every way for your generosity, which through us produces thanksgiving to God*”. This is the paradox of human life, according to Paul: the more we give of what we have and are to others, the more enriched we become. When everyone gives, everyone gets, but the receiver is not the only who becomes enriched, also the donor.

C. Testimony

Claire Nehring is a houseparent at Saint Joseph’s Indian School in Chamberlain. South Dakota. Here is her testimony:

A short time ago was the birthday of Fr. Leo Dehon, the founder of the SCJs (Priests of the Sacred Heart). This led to some discussions on campus about what it meant to be Dehonian. I remember quizzing our St. Joseph’s kids about Fr. Dehon once. What did they know?

Born in France!

Died in Belgium!

Had three doctorates!

Wore glasses!

While interesting, these bits of information weren’t terribly enlightening. I had some time between picking up my runner from track practice and dropping off my baseball players at the field, so I thought I would do some research.

One really obvious fact: Fr. Dehon did not have 10 teenage boys to contend with when he wanted a few minutes of quiet time.

I bet he never had to throw a wet sock off his desk as some giggling kid hit the floor behind the office door and whispered, “Don’t tell him I’m in here!” All while some other kid is screaming down the hall, “Where’s Annnndrew??” and swinging the other wet sock with a vengeance.

My Dehonian moment was going to have to wait until after the kids had gone to bed.

In the meantime — there was dinner to eat and dishes to do. This one had to go the tutor and that one had to find his Geography book. The guys with privileges tried to run off all their excess energy at the Rec center and the ones who stayed back to do homework got hopped up

on snacks and algebraic aggravation. Home meeting became a debate over sharing time on the X Box and whether or not people should leave the room when they fart.

Prayer time was calmer, with intentions offered for family, friends, baseball, track, Sandy Hook and the new Pope. And a special intention for the guy who was going to end up on the bottom of the...3...2...1...Dogpile!

I admit, I was not feeling very Dehonian at the end of the day. I was tired, cranky, and I had a pile of unfinished tasks. I was not in a more saintly state of mind the next morning either. When I finally plowed into Maija late in the afternoon, the only thing I had on my mind was making it to my day off and taking a long nap. In her infinite wisdom, she said to me, “Get out of my office and don’t come back until you have your heart in your work again.” Well, duh.

We work for the Sacred Heart of Jesus.

Not the Sacred Rule Book of Jesus. Or the Sacred Schedule of Jesus.

We are called to be heart-centered. To paraphrase the Tin Woodsman, “Hearts will never be practical, until they can be made unbreakable.” There is something reckless and unpractical about being heart-centered. This is different from being careless or thoughtless — Fr. Dehon was a learned man and he was neither impulsive nor fickle. Rather, he was doggedly persistent, even in the face of heartbreak. Kind of like someone else we know — and whose steps we are following this Holy Week.

A Sacred Heart space is expansive and inclusive and yes, somewhat foolish — letting in the lost, the weak, the so-called outsiders.

There is room for a kid who lost his mom and a kid who feels like he has to be the man of the house. There’s room for honor-rollers and homework procrastinators. There’s room for wall punchers and cookie bakers, emo-kids and hip-hoppers.

As a matter of fact, there’s room in there for everyone, including a somewhat exasperated houseparent and her laundry list of seemingly “important” things to do. If we all squish together, there’s space for you too. Just leave the room if you fart. ‘Cause that’s one rule we are going to keep.”

D. Discussion and sharing

In his *Retreat with the Sacred Heart* Fr. Dehon counselled his followers: “Support those institutions which can contribute to the reign of social justice and which defend the weak against oppression by the powerful” (RSC 610).

- Share with one another your participation or membership in organizations that promote social justice and support the poor and the weak.
- In preparation for this meeting, do an internet research on organizations that promote social justice. You could divide the group, each person or couple, taking one specific area, for example, immigration, refugees, low-income housing, soup kitchens, etc. and report on these issues.

F. A Moment of Prayer

Use the two quotes of Fr. Dehon below as a moment of prayer. Give a copy of the text to the participants and ask them to formulate a prayer of thanksgiving and intercession. Finish the prayer time with a hymn and a Litany of the Sacred Heart.

“All people are deserving of respect and justice, and they have a basic right to enjoy, here on earth, the conditions which nourish their intellectual, moral, and spiritual life. They have a right to daily bread for themselves and their family. They have a right equally and even more so, to human treatment, to a sufficient degree of education and liberty, and to the opportunity to worship and serve God.” (MSO 15)

“Lord may your kingdom come! May your divine Heart reign among us! I passionately desire and I want to work for this. And first of all I want to give you my heart! Come, live and reign in me. Give me your spirit, make me know your will, direct and govern my entire life. Also make me an ardent and zealous apostle of the reign of your divine Heart in society.” (RSC 613)

Litany to the Heart of Jesus

Let us turn to the open heart of Jesus:

V/ Heart of Jesus, house of God and gate of heaven,

R/ **Lord have mercy.**

V/ Heart of Jesus, source of justice and love,

R/ **Lord have mercy.**

V/ Heart of Jesus, from whose fullness we have all received

R/ **Lord have mercy.**

V/ Heart of Jesus, fountain of life and holiness,

R/ **Lord have mercy.**

V/ Heart of Jesus, broken for our sins,

R/ **Lord have mercy.**

V/ Heart of Jesus, obedient unto death,

R/ **Lord have mercy.**

V/ Heart of Jesus, our life and resurrection

R/ **Lord have mercy.**

Conclusion: May the Lord bless us, keep us from all evil, and bring us to everlasting life.

All: Amen.

Literature

Meeting XXXV

LIVING IN FAMILY AND SOCIETY

Objectives of the Meeting

Within the larger objectives of the *Spiritual Path* such as the growth of a common spirit among the lay Dehonians and the appreciation of the spirituality of Fr. Dehon, this session will allow the participants:

- To understand that the Dehonian path calls for social involvement.
- To describe scriptural, magisterial, and Dehonian roots for social justice.
- To describe the social apostolate of the Priests of the Sacred Heart in their area.
- To explain the connection between social justice and the Sacred Heart.

Structure of the Meeting

Prayer. The material, particularly that for the *Reflections* portion, needs to be given to the Lay Dehonians ahead of time. This portion is divided into paragraphs, each including material from primary sources and a reflection. Each person is asked to prayerfully study each paragraph ahead of time, individually, and jot notes for themselves on each before going to the next. This is crucial toward the goal of appropriating the Spiritual Path into their daily life. Their notes can include questions, thoughts, items that strike them as new, or personal thoughts and examples.

Sharing. While praying with the text of the session, participants were asked to jot notes. The leader for each session will divide the group into subgroups of at least five but not more than nine. The leader will begin by reading the first paragraph aloud, then asking each participant to share in their group the fruits of their prayer with it. (Their notes will help everyone to remember points to share.) This is crucial toward the goal of recognizing the common spirit that unites Lay Dehonians and appropriating the Spiritual Path into their daily life. After a suitable time is allowed for discussion, the leader will ask one group to share something from their discussion. Then, having read and discussed together the first paragraph, the leader asks another to read the second, and the sharing continues.

Development of the Meeting

A. Welcome

A welcoming activity might be for the participants in small groups to introduce one another to the reality each calls their “family” in all its diverse contexts. Reflect with one another what the introduction of the spirituality of Fr. Dehon has done to their experience and reality of living in a family. This may also be expanded to include their living in a particular society and country.

A word from the Bible (Deuteronomy 4.1,5-9)

⁴ So now, Israel, give heed to the statutes and ordinances that I am teaching you to observe, so that you may live to enter and occupy the land that the LORD, the God of your ancestors, is giving you.

⁵ See, just as the LORD my God has charged me, I now teach you statutes and ordinances for you to observe in the land that you are about to enter and occupy. ⁶ You must observe them diligently, for this will show your wisdom and discernment to the peoples, who, when they hear all these statutes,

will say, ‘Surely this great nation is a wise and discerning people!’⁷ For what other great nation has a god so near to it as the LORD our God is whenever we call to him?⁸ And what other great nation has statutes and ordinances as just as this entire law that I am setting before you today?

⁹ But take care and watch yourselves closely, so as neither to forget the things that your eyes have seen nor to let them slip from your mind all the days of your life; make them known to your children and your children’s children.

A word from Fr. Dehon

As Fr. Dehon saw it, the poor of the 19th century, who were living out the agony of Christ, were mostly the masses of workers who were exploited and humiliated by rampant industrialization. He would become the defender of these men and women whose dignity was not being respected.

The link between spirituality and the struggle for humanity, between the mystical and the political, could not be better emphasized.

The originality of Christianity is built on this linkage and it remained a major concern for Dehon, who wanted to share it with his followers. He imagined Jesus saying, “The reign of my Heart in society is the reign of justice, charity, mercy, and pity for the poor, the humble, and those who suffer. I am asking you to dedicate yourselves to all these works, to encourage them, to cooperate with them. Support all the institutions that can contribute to the reign of social justice and that defend the weak from oppression by the powerful” (RSC 610).

B. Reflection on the theme

1. A dramatization of Fr. Dehon

(Preparation for this session will require the help of one of the Lay Dehonians to play the part of Fr. Dehon in a script about his experience at San Quentin, France. The Leader will take the part of the interviewer, the Dehonian the part of Dehon. This will help the Lay Dehonians appropriate the mission of Dehon as their own, to see one of their own literally "playing the part". The script will need to be given to the Lay Dehonian ahead of time. The Lay Dehonian dresses the part of Fr. Dehon as much as able, and enters the room during the introduction).

Leader For our session today, we have a special guest interview. Ladies and Gentlemen, coming to us from San Quentin, France, I would like to introduce Fr. Leo John Dehon.

Leader Fr. Dehon, welcome to our parish!

Dehon Thank you, it is good to be here.

Leader I thought we might ask you some questions about your first assignment as a priest²⁴.

Dehon At the parish in San Quentin, France? Wonderful!

²⁴ On November 16, 1871, Dehon began his ministry at the basilica of Saint Quentin.

Leader Can you tell us about San Quentin?

Dehon Well, San Quentin was a factory town, producing textiles. The church had about 30,000 members. I was assigned as the seventh associate pastor; I was the newest and youngest of the priests.

Leader It must have been exciting.

Dehon Not at first.

Leader What do you mean?

Dehon Well, I was pretty close to books and studies. My fellow students would tease me about the pile of books I always seemed to carry. I was expecting to be assigned to a school or some other academic position. Even some of my teachers were surprised when I was assigned to parish in a factory town.²⁵

Leader So then, what did you do with this unexpected assignment?

Dehon It became a moment in which I saw the hand of God in my life. At least now I can say that, but then it wasn't so easy. It took prayer and time. It was my experience in that parish where I first learned to really understand what it means to be devoted to the Sacred Heart of Jesus. I listened to people, especially those who were burdened in many ways.

Leader You say you listened to people – what did you hear? What do you mean when you say that you finally understood what it meant to be devoted to the Sacred Heart?

Dehon It was through this experience that I learned that homage to the Sacred Heart of Jesus is not simply an act of private devotion. It isn't just about me and God, it isn't just about the tender mercies in the Heart of Christ, or even the promises of the Sacred Heart. Devotion to the Sacred Heart is a social act as well. Christ wants to be present in our hearts, yes, but he also wants to be present in our world. We can't love God if we do not love our neighbor. And the poor of that town were not being shown very much love. Looking back now, I can see that my mother knew this all along, even if it took me some time. Her prayer and devotion to Christ was always linked with care for the poor.²⁶

Leader Obviously this first assignment was a turning point for you. Why did it strike you so deeply? Did the needs of the poor surprise you?

Dehon I grew up in a family that was financially comfortable. We knew of the poor, but I didn't have the slightest idea what it meant to be poor. Although I had seen poverty through my

²⁵ As one of his seminary friends, Abbé Guilhen, put it: "I think you're letting us down. There's no way I can get used to the idea of you as chaplain. You, a chaplain! It seems ridiculous to me. Dear God, doesn't Leo Dehon deserve something better?" Letter of 9 August 1872, quoted in Manzoni, Leo Dehon and his message, p 190.

²⁶ "Il ne faut pas se représenter la dévotion au Sacré Cœur comme une sorte de christianisme facile, atténuant les obligations du christianisme véritable. Il faut la concevoir comme une dévotion forte et généreuse, qui attire, il est vrai, les âmes par la douceur de l'amour, mais pour les rendre capables d'accomplir dans toute leur étendue les obligations sacrées de la vie chrétienne, de pratiquer dans toute leur plénitude les vertus fortes qui la constituent", Dehon in "Le Règne du Coeur de Jésus", Editorial January 1890, [EXT 8035023](#).

participation in the St. Vincent de Paul Society in Paris and through travel, I was not prepared to experience the magnitude of human misery in this factory town.

Leader But if you were in a factory town, weren't people employed? Why was there such poverty?

Dehon Employers were not just to their employees. They disregarded their obligations to employees. Wages were determined by the stock exchange that constantly went up and down and even when they were up, they was barely enough for people to support themselves or their families. Even more, the entire family would work in the factory. One parent would get off from work, and the other would begin their shift. The work day was 12 hours long. When they weren't in school, the children would work. Some children would leave school at an early age to start full-time work. The family never had a chance to be together as a family. People had no opportunity for a day of rest, and were not given time off for church. All of this was horribly unjust.

Leader This sounds awful – did the church address this in any way?

Dehon Because of the way they were treated, the workers had no respect for government or employers. Sadly, even for the clergy who seemed to ignore their problems. No, the clergy did ignore their problems. The priests were content to pray in their armchairs and stay in their sacristies, rather than out to be with the people.

Leader That is a very strong statement about your fellow priests.

Dehon I became so frustrated at what I was seeing that I finally called the entire community on the issue. In my Christmas homily I said, that society had become rotten, and that the workers' claims about wages and work hours were well founded. I said that the way things were, were evil, unjust, and threatened the fabric of society.²⁷ Later, I would even call on the priests to get out of their armchairs and sacristies and show some concern for the people.

Leader That is what you called on others to do: what did you do personally to address these issues?

Dehon I realized that I couldn't just talk and pray about it. Prayer is important, but what these people needed was hands-on action. I still maintained my pastoral duties at church, but in addition, and with the help of parishioners and others, I started a youth center for boys, to gather after school and during holidays and keep them busy and off the streets²⁸. I worked to establish a workers' union. I got employers together to study their obligations, as Christians, to their workers. I organized a 30-bed hostel for young working men and domestic workers. I worked with the larger diocesan church to establish a Bureau of Social Welfare. To bring workers together, I also initiated and organized conferences for the Catholic Worker's Union²⁹.

²⁷ You will find the text of this homily "Sermon pour le jour de Noël 1871 in www.dehondocs.it.

²⁸ The St. Joseph Youth Club was one of the most important social and pastoral initiatives of Dehon. Within four years more than 440 young workers had become members of the Youth Club with an average presence of more than 200 members every Sunday.

²⁹ Dehon joined a network which was started in 1871 by Albert de Mun and R. La Tour du Pin, the Oeuvre des Cercles Catholiques d'ouvriers. The purpose was to create associations of workers under the direction of the best Catholic

Leader Your work seems like it might have hit on some touchy subjects. How were you received by others? The factory owners? Your fellow clergy? The workers themselves?

Dehon The reaction was mixed. Of course, some employers -as well as some clergy- called me a socialist. Today, I think you would use the word communist. However, I would not be so easily dismissed. The love of Christ, even for workers, cannot be so easily dismissed. And God's love is the foundation for a just society. I was determined to let people know that God's will and the mission of the church is focused on their well-being, not only of their spiritual life, but of their material, family, and social life as well. Some employers did not cooperate at all and said that they were against me, but even they –to a limited extent– stopped the practice of working on Sundays.

Leader Did anyone support your views?

Dehon Yes, I did receive support from many as well. Merchants, factory owners, and politicians contributed to the Youth Center and sat on its board. Many of the factory owners were not intending to be unjust in the way they treated their workers, they were not heartless. They just needed to know their obligations as Christian employers. Some made changes once they became aware. My bishop acknowledged my work. My pastor provided a building for the Youth Center, and a fellow assistant pastor helped staff the Center.

Leader You sound like you were running in a hundred directions. Did you ever feel overwhelmed by it all?

Dehon Yes, definitely. As I said earlier, the vocation that I was living was not the one that I envisioned for myself. I felt that I was so busy at St. Quentin; there was so much that needed to be done. Thankfully, I was able to keep myself rooted in the love of the Sacred Heart and living a life of reparation³⁰.

Leader Wait, you haven't used that word before. What do you mean, living a life of reparation?

Dehon That is the path for someone devoted to the Heart of Christ. Reparation starts with the great love that God, that the Heart of Christ, has for us. Everything starts there, with God's love. You see, Christ wants to be present to each of us, within our own hearts, so that we experience God's great love for us. And, Christ also wants to be present within society's groups as well. Whether that group is a family, an after-school program for children, the workplace, or a worker's union: all are to show the loving presence of Christ. For that to happen, we must respond to God's love. That is the heart of reparation: responding to the love contained in the Heart of Christ by being willing to do the will of God in our own lives, and in the world.

members of the middle class. Later Dehon moved on to support more autonomous forms of workers' organization without any paternalistic influence.

³⁰ "Le dimanche il fallait se multiplier. En semaine, il y avait les visites des malades, des irréguliers, les fêtes à préparer, l'apostolat quotidien au Cercle, les conférences, etc, etc. Grâce à Dieu, je crois que cette vie surmenée ne m'éloignait pas trop de l'union avec Dieu, cependant mon âme en souffrait un peu." Dehon, Notes sur l'Histoire de ma Vie, [NHV 10/152](#).

Leader Those are very powerful words, Fr. Dehon, but I am afraid that we are out of time. There are so many questions that I am sure we could all ask. But, we thank you for your time.

Dehon Thank you! I am always happy to preach the gospel and spread devotion to the heart of Christ!

Leader Let us thank Fr. Dehon for his time and wish him well on his way!

Dehon Thank you.

2. Reflecting on Social Justice with Fr. Dehon

(Perhaps it is not possible to discuss all the points made in this meeting. It may therefore be necessary to make a choice which of the texts will be discussed.)

1. The Dehonian path is a way of social justice

“The lay faithful are called to cultivate an authentic lay spirituality by which they are reborn as new men and women, both sanctified and sanctifiers, immersed in the mystery of God and inserted in society. Such a spirituality will build up the world according to Jesus’ Spirit. It will make people capable of looking beyond history, without separating themselves from it, of cultivating a passionate love for God without looking away from their brothers and sisters, whom they are able to see as the Lord sees them and love as the Lord loves them. This spirituality precludes both an intimist spiritualism and a social activism, expressing itself instead in a life-giving synthesis that bestows unity, meaning and hope on an existence that for so many different reasons is contradictory and fragmented. Prompted by such a spirituality, the lay faithful are able to contribute ‘to the sanctification of the world, as from within like leaven, by fulfilling their own particular duties. Thus, especially by the witness of their own life ... they must manifest Christ to others’ (*Lumen Gentium*, 31)”.

(Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church, #545)

The Parable of the Rich Man.

As Jesus was setting out on a journey, a man ran up, knelt down before him, and asked him, “Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?”

Jesus answered him, “Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone. You know the commandments: ‘You shall not kill; you shall not commit adultery; you shall not steal; you shall not bear false witness; you shall not defraud; honor your father and your mother.’”

He replied and said to him, “Teacher, all of these I have observed from my youth.”

Jesus, looking at him, loved him and said to him, “You are lacking in one thing. Go, sell what you have, and give to [the] poor and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me.”

At that statement his face fell, and he went away sad, for he had many possessions.

(Mark 10:17-22)

Father Dehon saw an intimate connection between devotion to the Sacred Heart and social action. This is the same connection the Church professes when it teaches that we cannot have a passionate love for God without an active concern for the needs of our brothers and sisters. The Dehonian path includes both a deep spirituality rooted in knowing that God loves us, and committed action to caring for neighbor. He lived this in his own life. We know that his experience of being loved was rooted in his experience of love in his family. So too, when he became aware of the suffering of people around him in Saint Quentin, he desired to respond with love. This response was not a sentimental "I will pray for you" response, but one which worked to eliminate the cause of suffering.

2. The Dehonian path is walked in solidarity with the poor

“The principle of the universal destination of goods requires that the poor, the marginalized and in all cases those whose living conditions interfere with their proper growth should be the focus of particular concern. To this end, the preferential option for the poor should be reaffirmed in all its force (John Paul II, *Address to the Third General Conference of Latin American Bishops, Puebla, Mexico*). ‘*This is an option, or a special form of primacy in the exercise of Christian charity, to which the whole tradition of the Church bears witness. It affects the life of each Christian inasmuch as he or she seeks to imitate the life of Christ, but it applies equally to our social responsibilities and hence to our manner of living, and to the logical decisions to be made concerning the ownership and use of goods. Today, furthermore, given the worldwide dimension which the social question has assumed, this love of preference for the poor, and the decisions which it inspires in us, cannot but embrace the immense multitudes of the hungry, the needy, the homeless, those without health care and, above all, those without hope of a better future.*’ (John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, 42).”

(Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church, #182)

Fr. Dehon's experience in Saint Quentin gives an example of what solidarity with the poor looks like. It can be good to consider first what he did not do. Fr. Dehon did not respond by telling those who suffered that he would pray for them, and then walk away. He did not tell them to accept their suffering on this earth like Christ did, and know that they would receive their reward in heaven. He did not preach that each person should individually help their neighbor, and leave it at that. When Fr. Dehon came into contact with the poor, with those in need, and with those without hope for a better future in Saint Quentin: he did what he could to organize society to alleviate the poverty and need around him. He organized people and worked to better their labor conditions and their wages. He spoke with those who had influence in the town, region, and nation, to make them aware of the suffering around them. He helped people to organize themselves in ways that contributed to society.

3. The Dehonian path is walked with others

“The faithful are called to engage in the apostolate as individuals in the varying circumstances of their life. They should remember, nevertheless, that man is naturally social and that it has pleased God to unite those who believe in Christ into the people of God (cf. 1 Peter 2:5-10) and into one body (cf. 1 Cor. 12:12). The group apostolate of Christian believers then happily corresponds to a human and Christian need and at the same time signifies the communion and unity of the Church in Christ, who said, “Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them” (Matt. 18:20).

For this reason the faithful should participate in the apostolate by way of united effort. They should be apostles both in their family communities and in their parishes and dioceses, which themselves express the community nature of the apostolate, as well as in the informal groups which they decide to form among themselves.

The group apostolate is very important also because the apostolate must often be performed by way of common activity both by the Church communities and the various spheres. For the associations

You are the salt of the earth. But if salt loses its taste, with what can it be seasoned? It is no longer good for anything but to be thrown out and trampled underfoot. You are the light of the world. A city set on a mountain cannot be hidden. Nor do they light a lamp and then put it under a bushel basket; it is set on a lamp stand, where it gives light to all in the house. Just so, your light must shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your heavenly Father.

(Matthew 5: 13-16)

established for carrying on the apostolate in common sustain their members, form them for the apostolate, and rightly organize and regulate their apostolic work so that much better results can be expected than if each member were to act on his own.”

(II Vatican Council, *Apostolicam Actuositatem* #18)

As Dehonians, we do not practice charity alone, nor work alone for social justice. We do so as the body of Christ. Alone, a single grain of salt does little. A single light can easily be snuffed out. No. Our calling to is to come together, to work together. Working to change society is difficult. Working alone, we can easily be overcome by fear, fatigue, and resistance. When we are with other, we can get support when we are weak, and give support when another needs encouragement. Working with others also magnifies our efforts. Working together, in solidarity, people can accomplish more than they could on their own.

C. Testimony

The testimony will be given during the Closing Prayer

Ahead of time, the leader asks two Lay Dehonians to prepare a short testimony of about five minutes about work they have done on behalf of social justice. Ask them to let the following get them started, but they do not have to respond to each question. How did they get started in their ministry? Have they had any conversion experiences along the way? Did they have to overcome any prejudices or change any of their perspectives. What makes the ministry challenging? What makes it rewarding? In what ways has this ministry called them to work with others? How has this ministry affected their understanding and relationship with God?

If this testimony or reflection within the group took place in the previous session, you might invite someone in the community to speak about his daily work as a Catholic. It could be a teacher, a nurse, a social worker, Saint Vincent de Paul worker, a politician, etc. The presentation could be an interview or direct discussion with the group.

D. Discussion and Sharing

The Dehonian path is a way we are called to walk together

During this session, we have learned about the call to work for justice and assist the poor. We have learned that this is not just an individual responsibility, but a group responsibility. Let us take time to discuss how we can live what we have learned.

E. A Moment of Prayer

All gather around the baptismal font of the parish. The Easter Candle is nearby and lit. A bowl of salt sits next to the candle, as well as tapers. Lighting is minimal. (If the meeting takes place outside of a Church, an appropriate prayer center might be created in the meeting space using a larger bowl of water, a bible, with a candle (and tapers) and a bowl of salt.)

Hymn

All sing a hymn which sings of people being a light to the earth. During this song, each lights a taper from the Easter Candle and hold it during the service.

Prayer

Leader We pray again words we have prayed before. They are the words of Father Dehon. They are words which call us to love God. They are words which call us to love neighbor. Together, we proclaim:

All **The Heart of Jesus is overflowing with compassion
for all those who suffer
those beset by troubles, difficulties, and hardships;
the toilers, the destitute, and the sick and infirm.
His is the Heart of a Father, the Heart of a Mother, the Heart of a Shepherd.**

(CSJ 126)

The Word of God

Leader Let us extinguish our candles to receive the light and life of the gospel. We hear again from the Gospel of St. Matthew.

Reader From the Gospel according the St. Matthew *(Matthew 5.13-16)*

“You are the salt of the earth. But if salt loses its taste, with what can it be seasoned? It is no longer good for anything but to be thrown out and trampled underfoot. You are the light of the world. A city set on a mountain cannot be hidden. Nor do they light a lamp and then put it under a bushel basket; it is set on a lamp stand, where it gives light to all in the house. Just so, your light must shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your heavenly Father.”

Reader The Gospel of the Lord:

All **Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ**

Testimony

Leader Let us now hear testimony from two of us who have been involved in ministry to the poor, ministry to those who suffer, whose lives are beset by troubles, difficulties, and hardships. Their ministry began in the waters of this font. They have preached the gospel with their lives, the gospel that calls us to be a light to the world, and salt of the earth.

(Two testimonies are offered.)

In the sign of water and salt

Leader I invite each person to come forward to sign themselves with water, and taste a pinch of salt.

Each person comes forward and signs themselves a takes a bit of salt.

Leader At one time, salt was used in baptism. Just as our sign of the cross is a reminder of our own baptismal call to love God and neighbor, so too was salt a reminder of the Christian way of life. It is a reminder of the Dehonian path that we walk. Salt preserves that which is worth keeping. It prevents rot and decay. Salt brings flavor to that which has become tasteless. As Christians, as Dehonians, we are called to be salt for the earth. May our lives, especially our lives together, preserve the Gospel. May we work to prevent the rot

and decay of injustice. May our actions, with Christ, help the poor to live full human lives of dignity.

The Lord's prayer

Leader And so, we pray together for the coming of God's Kingdom, in the words that Jesus taught us.

All Our Father....

Concluding

Leader Our prayer is ended, let us go forth to be salt and light for the earth.

All Thanks be to God.

Leader But, before we go, let us offer each other the sign of peace...

Literature

Meeting XXXVI **INVOLVED IN SOCIAL SPIRITUALITY**

Objectives of the Meeting

Within the larger objectives of the Spiritual Path such as the growth of a common spirit among the lay Dehonians and the appreciation of the spirituality of Fr. Dehon, this session will allow the participants:

- To understand the baptismal roots of the Dehonian path.
- To understand that the Dehonian path is lived out in family life, the parish, and the world.
- To understand that the Dehonian path calls for a life of personal virtue.
- To understand that the Dehonian path calls for social involvement.

Structure of the Meeting

Prayer. The material, particularly that for the *Reflections* portion, needs to be given to the Lay Dehonians ahead of time. This portion is divided into paragraphs, each including material from primary sources and a reflection. Each person is asked to prayerfully study each paragraph ahead of time, individually, and jot notes for themselves on each before going to the next. This is crucial toward the goal of appropriating the Spiritual Path into their daily life. Their notes can include questions, thoughts, items that strike them as new, or personal thoughts and examples.

Sharing. While praying with the text of the session, participants were asked to jot notes. The leader for each session will divide the group into subgroups of at least five but not more than nine. The leader will begin by reading the first paragraph aloud, then asking each participant to share in their group the fruits of their prayer with it. (Their notes now helping each to remember points to share.) This is crucial toward the goal of recognizing the common spirit that unites Lay Dehonians and appropriating the Spiritual Path into their daily life. After a suitable time is allowed for discussion, the leader will ask one group to share something from their discussion. Then, having read and discussed together the first paragraph, the leader asks another to read the second, and the sharing continues.

Development of the Meeting

A. Welcome

The opening verses of a song that sings of love and working for justice in the world.
In a place visible to all, perhaps on a stand, is a white cloth with a Dehonian cross.

A word from the Bible (Luke 4.16-18)

Reader A reading from the Holy Gospel according to Luke.

All **Glory to you, O Lord**

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 to captives
and recovery of sight to the blind,
to let the oppressed go free,
and to proclaim a year acceptable to the Lord.”

A word from Fr. Dehon

(Reader) How must one begin? This is the first question which must be asked by any person who is vested by others with moral or actual authority which he would like to put to good use.

Curate in his parish; vicar under the supervision of a curate; Catholic layperson holding a position of esteem in society; industrial leader employing numerous workers; landlord or farmer running an agricultural enterprise; anyone who, having experienced a desire to work for the moral and religious renewal of our ... country, wants to use his God-given influence for the good of God, the Church, and France, is usually troubled by uncertainties and hesitations at the outset.

How to begin? We shall reply: by yourself. Above all, whether priest or devout layman, you must remind yourself that you were not made solely for the sacristy or the pew; that you are in your own right the salt of society and the light of social life; that you must reach out to others.

Reader For the message in this reading, let us give God thanks,

All **Thanks be to God.**

(Adapted from his article: *Methods of Social Work*³¹)

The closing verses of the same song sung at the welcome moment.

As the final verses are sung, someone brings forward a bowl with holy water and places it on the white cloth.

³¹ See *Social Works, Volume I: Articles, 1899 to 1922*; “La méthode des œuvres sociales. Par où il faut commencer ?”, ART-REV-8031019, 1-2.

B. Reflection on the theme

1. The Dehonian path is rooted in baptism

“In the Church, there is a diversity of service but unity of purpose. Christ conferred on the apostles and their successors the duty of teaching, sanctifying, and ruling in His name and power. But the laity, too, share in the priestly, prophetic, and royal office of Christ and therefore have their own role to play in the mission of the whole people of God in the Church and in the world.”

(II Vatican Council, *Apostolicam Actuositatem* #2)

Being a Lay Dehonian means, first of all, living the grace of our baptism. That is the beginning of our life of service. At baptism, we were each anointed to be a priest. This does not mean we are each ordained to Holy Orders. That is different. It does mean that we are each called to make our lives an offering to God. This is so important, it is worth saying again: we are each called to offer our lives to God's will in the Church and in the World. This can be a challenging, and exciting, reality. It can be challenging, because it can be comfortable to let our parish priest carry the responsibility to be holy and proclaim the Gospel. When we do this, we excuse ourselves from our baptismal call. It can be exciting, because this call to be priest makes every part of our lives an offering to God: our family, our involvement in the parish, our labor and work, the way we treat others, and the way we treat society and creation.

*The God of power
and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ
has freed you from sin
and brought you to new life
through water and the Holy Spirit.
He now anoints you
with the chrism of salvation,
so that, united with his people,
you may remain forever a member of Christ
who is Priest, Prophet, and King.*

(Anointing after Baptism
Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults)

2. The Dehonian path starts with the family

Rome, December 20, 1866

Dear parents,

This letter will reach you a little before New Year's Day. Nevertheless, even though it's a bit premature, I'm sending along my best wishes. My hope for you is good health and temporal prosperity and, above all, peace of heart and progress along the way of salvation. ...

My affection and filial devotion for you grows each day and often the thought of the gratitude that I owe you fills my heart with emotion. ... I attribute the grace of the vocation and zeal that God has given me to the good guidance I received from you during my childhood. I give thanks for it especially to my mother who always taught me the rules for holiness together with the example of it.

Please send my best wishes to my uncles in La Capelle, Dorengt, Nouvion, and Vervins. ... Also extend my wishes for a happy new year to the Senior Priest, to Frs. Fievet, and to the others who ask about me. I've enclosed a little letter for Henry and Laure and one for Mama Dehon.

Would you be so kind once and a while to send me some French stamps in your letters because it's not easy to find them in Rome. I embrace you with all my heart and I will do it again in spirit on New Year's Day.

Your devoted son,
L. Dehon

“The family has received from God its mission to be the first and vital cell of society. It will fulfill this mission if it shows itself to be the domestic sanctuary of the Church through the mutual affection of its members and the common prayer they offer to God, if the whole family is caught up in the liturgical worship of the Church, and if it provides active hospitality and promotes justice and other good works for the service of all the brethren in need. Among the multiple activities of the family apostolate may be enumerated the following: the adoption of abandoned infants, hospitality to

the strangers, assistance in the operation of schools, helpful advice and material assistance for adolescents, help to engaged couples in preparing themselves better for marriage, catechetical work, support of married couples and families involved in material and moral crises, help for the aged not only by providing them with the necessities of life but also by obtaining for them a fair share of the benefits of economic progress.”

(II Vatican Council, *Apostolicam Actuositatem* #11)

Fr. Dehon believed that the source of our relationship with God is found in his Love. First, we experience God's love for us. Then, we respond by extending that love to those around us. This starts in the family. Fr. Dehon's experience of God's love was rooted in his experience of love from his parents. This sort of love is not always easy. Neither was it for the Dehon family. They were not perfect. Fr. Dehon's father, and at times his mother, did not want him to become a priest. They wanted him to be a lawyer. There were many years of strain. Many arguments. Many tears. And yet, through good times and tough times, Fr. Dehon found in his family a love that taught him about the love in the Heart of Christ. This love was expressed in words of affection. It also called the family to reach outside of themselves: the love they experienced in each other was expressed through liturgy and service to others. Fr. Dehon's mother was the best example of this: she was also involved in service to those in need community. But, once Fr. Dehon was ordained, even his father began to be more involved in the parish. We can learn from Fr. Dehon's experience of family: express affection; stay connected even through tough times, keep a central place for God and parish, and reach out to those in need.

3. The Dehonian path is walked in the parish

*Bless this boat, its equipment
and all who will use it.
Protect them from the dangers of wind and rain
and all the perils of the deep.
May Christ, who calmed the storm
and filled the nets of his disciples,
bring us all to the harbor of light and peace.*

(from the Blessing of Boats and Fishing Gear)

“Offering an obvious example of the apostolate on the community level is the parish, inasmuch as it brings together the many human differences found within its boundaries and draws them into the universality of the Church. The laity should accustom themselves to working in the parish in close union with their priests, bringing to the church community their own and the world's problems as well as questions concerning human salvation, all of which should be examined and resolved by common deliberation. As far as possible, the laity ought to collaborate energetically in every apostolic and missionary undertaking sponsored by their local parish.”

(II Vatican Council, *Apostolicam Actuositatem* #10)

What does a Dehonian parish look like? What would Fr. Dehon have wanted a parish to look like? We can get a clue from his first parish experience at Saint Quentin, France. Many times he would tell both the priest and the people to "Get out of the Sacristy" or to "Get out of the pew." Of course, that means people do spend time in the Sacristy and the pew. But, Fr. Dehon had little patience for Sunday-only Catholics, or priests bound to their church building. Being a Eucharistic people demands that people reach out. During the week, Fr. Dehon called his parishioners to learn about what it means to be Catholic, and about social justice. He reached out to youth in need. He created healthy places for youth and men to spend time when the workday was over. He helped provide housing for people who needed it, especially single

factory workers. This is what a Dehonian parish looks like: people gathering to worship God, and then leaving to make God's love real on the streets of the world.

4. The Dehonian path is walked in the world

“But the laity, by their very vocation, seek the kingdom of God by engaging in temporal affairs and by ordering them according to the plan of God. They live in the world, that is, in each and in all of the secular professions and occupations. They live in the ordinary circumstances of family and social life, from which the very web of their existence is woven. They are called there by God that by exercising their proper function and led by the spirit of the Gospel they may work for the sanctification of the world from within as a leaven.”

(II Vatican Council, *Lumen Gentium* #31)

Some people are surprised at first that the Church has an official blessing for boats and fishing gear. Boats and fishing can seem so ordinary and everyday. They are utterly common. And yet, is that not exactly where we are called to live baptism's call and preach the Gospel? It is in the common, ordinary, and everyday things we do where God's kingdom begins to grow. Yes, even in a fishing boat. Yes, also in the bus we take to work, through the briefcase or cash register we use, the shovel we hold, in the work that gets our hands dirty each day, with the coworkers and customers we meet at work. Some might find in such everyday people and places a distraction from their life of faith, a distraction from a holy life. Not Fr. Dehon. For Fr. Dehon, our ordinary relationships, our labor, the workplace, the street -or even a fishing boat- is the very place in which we are called to make the love of God visible.

5. The Dehonian path is a path of virtue

The laity fulfill this mission of the Church in the world especially by conforming their lives to their faith so that they become the light of the world as well as by practicing honesty in all their dealings so that they attract all to the love of the true and the good and finally to the Church and to Christ. They fulfill their mission also by fraternal charity which presses them to share in the living conditions, labors, sorrows, and aspirations of their brethren with the result that the hearts of all about them are quietly prepared for the workings of saving grace. Another requisite for the accomplishment of their task is a full consciousness of their role in building up society whereby they strive to perform their domestic, social, and professional duties with such Christian generosity that their manner of acting should gradually penetrate the whole world of life and labor.

*The Heart of Jesus
is overflowing with compassion
for all those who suffer;
those beset by troubles,
difficulties, and hardships;
the toilers, the destitute,
and the sick and infirm.
His is the Heart of a Father,
The Heart of a Mother,
The Heart of a Shepherd.*

(CSJ 126)

(II Vatican Council, *Apostolicam Actuositatem* #13)

Father Dehon felt the love of God strongly. He felt it first growing up in his family. That experience led him to have great compassion for those in the world who suffer, in those who need to experience that kind of love in their life. It can be easy to get intimidated when we think of all those who suffer in this world, those whose lives are filled with hardship. So many in this world toil, are destitute, or are in need of healing. It can be difficult to think of all the needs in the world. We wonder, what can we possibly do to help in the face of so much need?

Fr. Dehon believed that Christ's heart shows us the way: be compassionate. The Old Testament has a wonderful word to describe God's feeling toward us: lovingkindness. Like God, we are called to be loving and kind to those we meet in our family, at work, and with whom we work. That means the love of God calls us to be honest, true, fair, kind, and genuine to those in our family, our neighbors, our coworkers, our employees, our employers. In short: everywhere and with everyone. There is not any room on the Dehonian path for professing our love for God in church, and not following it up on the street and in the market by being fair and honest in what we do.

6. The Dehonian path cares for justice and creation

The faithful, therefore, must learn the deepest meaning and the value of all creation, as well as its role in the harmonious praise of God. They must assist each other to live holier lives even in their daily occupations. In this way the world may be permeated by the spirit of Christ and it may more effectively fulfill its purpose in justice, charity and peace. The laity have the principal role in the overall fulfillment of this duty. Therefore, by their competence in secular training and by their activity, elevated from within by the grace of Christ, let them vigorously contribute their effort, so that created goods may be perfected by human labor, technical skill and civic culture for the benefit of all men according to the design of the Creator and the light of His Word. May the goods of this world be more equitably distributed among all men, and may they in their own way be conducive to universal progress in human and Christian freedom. In this manner, through the members of the Church, will Christ progressively illumine the whole of human society with His saving light.

(II Vatican Council, *Lumen Gentium* #36)

As Dehonians, we live lives of personal virtue. Fr. Dehon wanted the love of God to be experienced in our own lives. He wanted us to respond to that love with truth and honesty to those we meet. He did not stop there. Fr. Dehon believed very strongly that just as we must have this personal experience of the love of Christ, so too must the societies of this world be permeated with the spirit and love of Christ. The Church places this responsibility firmly in the hands of the laity, including lay Dehonians. It is they who can best let the people, organizations, and nations of this world be permeated with justice, charity, and peace. After all, it is they whose lives are immersed in labor, they who have the secular know-how, and the civic and social skill to transform the way people deal with each other. This is an amazing call: through Baptism, as members of Christ, to transform human society so that it reflects God's love. This is also a call of courage and strength, because not everyone in the world will be happy with God's justice, such as a more equitable distribution of goods. However, with Fr. Dehon, we join all Christians in praying, "May your kingdom come."

C. Testimony

Based on our discussion of the paragraphs above, is there someone who can offer testimony by finishing one of the following sentences? Some of the questions might invite discussion afterward, or response. Be open to that.

"I am uncomfortable thinking of myself using the baptismal imagery of priest because..."

"A time when I felt that being a parent was a calling from God was when..."

"One of the biggest struggles I have in family life is trying to be an instrument of God's love when I am faced with family members who are..."

"A time my parent did something that made me feel loved was the time when..."

"One of the most memorable celebrations of our parish was the time when we..."

"I have a hard time thinking of my workplace as a holy place, as an encounter with God's love because..."

"I think it is difficult to be fair and honest with my boss/an employee/a coworker/a customer because..."

"A time I was the victim of injustice was when..."

"A time when I was unjust toward another was when..."

"A time when I had to make a real sacrifice for justice in the world was when..."

"My life feels comfortable, and don't feel touched by injustice because..."

"A time I was really proud of my district or country because of its sense of justice and right was when..."

"A time when I was ashamed of my district or country because of its injustice was when..."

"A time when I felt powerless in the face of injustice was when..." (Let this question turn into discussion. What do we do when we feel powerless? Are we as powerless as we feel? If we are powerless, where do we find our strength and peace? If we are not powerless, where do we find courage and love?)

D. Discussion and Sharing

After listening to the testimonies above, use the same phrases as above, and select one of the phrases to initiate an exchange in the group. Let it touch on your experience in the family, in the parish, in your city or town, in your country. By now the group should trust each other enough to allow for a frank and personal discussion. Let the conversation swirl as much as possible on the issues of justice. Use the last phrase perhaps as a starting point: *"A time when I felt powerless in the face of injustice was when..."*

E. A Moment of Prayer

Introduction

Leader It is now time for us to end our time together. It is time for us to return to family, to return to the streets of the world in service of the Gospel. We do so more conscious of the calling of our baptism, more conscious of Christ's love, more conscious of our calling to share that love in the world.

Let us hear again the words of Fr. Dehon.

Words of Fr. Dehon

Reader The words of Fr. Leo John Dehon, adapted from his article **METHODS OF SOCIAL WORK**.³²

How must one begin? This is the first question which must be asked by any person who is vested by others with moral or actual authority which he would like to put to good use.

Curate in his parish; vicar under the supervision of a curate; Catholic layperson holding a position of esteem in society; industrial leader employing numerous workers; landlord or farmer running an agricultural enterprise; anyone who, having experienced a desire to work for the moral and religious renewal of our ... country, wants to use his God-given influence for the good of God, the Church, and France, is usually troubled by uncertainties and hesitations at the outset.

How to begin? We shall reply: by yourself. Above all, whether priest or devout layman, you must remind yourself that you were not made solely for the sacristy or the pew; that you are in your own right the salt of society and the light of social life; that you must reach out to others...

Reader For the message in this reading, let us give God thanks,

All: Thanks be to God.

Hymn

(The first few verses of the hymn with which the evening began.)

Gospel reading

Reader A reading from the Holy Gospel according to Luke. *Luke 4:16-18*

All **Glory to you, O Lord**

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 to captives

and recovery of sight to the blind,

³² See *Social Works, Volume I: Articles, 1899 to 1922*; “La méthode des œuvres sociales. Par où il faut commencer?”, ART-REV-8031019, 1-2.

to let the oppressed go free,
and to proclaim a year acceptable to the Lord.”

(The closing verses of the same song.)

Leader How to begin? As members of Christ, the spirit of the Lord is upon us. It was given to us in baptism. How do we begin? Let us proclaim together the words of Fr. Dehon:

All **The Heart of Jesus is overflowing with compassion
for all those who suffer
those beset by troubles, difficulties, and hardships;
the toilers, the destitute, and the sick and infirm.
His is the Heart of a Father, the Heart of a Mother, the Heart of a Shepherd.**
(CSJ 126)

In the sign of water

Leader We begin by remembering the Grace and love of God that flows from our baptism. We begin by experiencing baptisms call to extend the love of God to the poor, to those held captive, to the blind and the oppressed, to those who suffer and toil. I invite us to come forward and mark each other with the waters of baptism.

All come forward and in some way mark each other's forehead in some way with holy water.

The Lord's prayer

Leader *And together let us pray in the words that Christ taught us...*

All ***Our Father....***

Concluding

Leader *And we close by offering each other the sign of peace.*

Literature

Meeting XXXVII

LEO DEHON AT PRAYER

Objectives of the Meeting

- To engage our thought, imagination, and desire in meditation in order to deepen our personal union with Christ (CCC, 2708);
- To meditate as Leo Dehon did: See (Jesus before my eyes), Love (Jesus in my heart), Act (Jesus in my hands);
- To meditate on the Passion of Christ, going from the exterior to the interior, from the interior to the superior (St. Augustine).

Structure of the Meeting

- To examine the way Leo Dehon meditated on Scripture: focusing on Jesus and allowing Him to speak to us through the inspired text;
- By focusing on Christ’s Passion “to always strive to discover my love under the surface of all the mysteries” of my life (VAM 115);
- Using Augustine’s method of going from the exterior to the interior to the superior in order to be filled with Christ-like love so we can carry our [metaphorical] crosses every day (Lk 9:23).

Development of the Meeting

A. Welcome

As we begin the session, it is suggested that we make use of the song “Day by Day.” One can find the lyrics and the melody by going to www.google.com and entering “Day by Day.” As you sing the song, you make make the following gestures: at “to see thee more clearly” one should hold one’s hands, palms open, about 12 in. (30 cm.) before one’s eyes; at “love thee more dearly” one should cross one’s palms over one’s heart; at “follow thee more nearly” one should hold one’s hands outstretched, palms up.

Song: “Day by Day” (from the musical “Godspell”)

Day by day
Oh Dear Lord
Three things I pray
To see thee more clearly
Love thee more dearly
Follow thee more nearly
Day by day

A word from the Bible (John 17.1-10)

The text of John 17 is part of the high priestly prayer of Jesus. It is a beautiful example of the great trust that Jesus had in his Father.

¹ After Jesus had spoken these words, he looked up to heaven and said, ‘Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son so that the Son may glorify you, ² since you have given him authority over all people, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him. ³ And this is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent. ⁴ I glorified you on earth by finishing the work that you gave me to do. ⁵ So now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had in your presence before the world existed.

⁶ ‘I have made your name known to those whom you gave me from the world. They were yours, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word. ⁷ Now they know that everything you have given me is from you; ⁸ or the words that you gave to me I have given to them, and they have received them and know in truth that I came from you; and they have believed that you sent me. ⁹ I am asking on their behalf; I am not asking on behalf of the world, but on behalf of those whom you gave me, because they are yours. ¹⁰ All mine are yours, and yours are mine; and I have been glorified in them.

A word from Fr. Dehon

Have the group reflect on the following saying of Fr. Dehon:

“We should read and meditate on the Word of God, interpreted by the interior voice of the Holy Spirit.” (NHV 6/58 – 29 May 1868, Deaconate Retreat)

B. Reflection on the theme

Several of Leo Dehon’s spiritual writings are in the form of meditations on the gospels. Typically, they follow the same format: (1) *Reading* of the scriptural text; (2) a *Meditation* which reflects on the meaning and implications of the text; (3) a *Prayer* requesting the grace exemplified in the text; and (4) a *Resolution* to cooperate with the grace that the Lord bestows in order to embody this teaching by taking it to heart and putting it into practice. This is an apostolic adaptation of the traditional monastic form of prayer known as “*Lectio Divina*,” which is a prayerful reading of the scriptures.

1. How Leo Dehon read (and meditated) the Scriptures

a. The prayer of the Church

The personal prayer of Christians has traditionally been modeled on the liturgical prayer of the Church. Its basic structure is a dialogue. In the liturgy the first reading from Scripture, which is proclaimed by the lector, is followed by a psalm which the community sings or recites as their *response* to the reading which they have just heard. For example, on the Feast of the Sacred Heart the first Scripture reading is taken from the prophet Ezekiel: “The Lord God says: I myself will look after and tend my sheep. As a shepherd tends his flock when he finds himself among his scattered sheep, so will I tend my sheep. I will rescue them from every place where they were scattered . . .” (Ez 34:11-12). The congregation’s response to this reading is taken from Psalm 23: “The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. In verdant pastures he gives me repose . . . Even though I walk in the

dark valley I fear no evil; for you are at my side . . .” The congregation’s psalm response affirms their acceptance of what they have just heard from the prophet Ezekiel. Similarly, after the Gospel is proclaimed by the celebrant it is followed by a “homily:” a word that means “similar to,” or “at one with” the Gospel that has just preceded it. To make the Gospel more effective in moving the minds and hearts of his hearers, the preacher should interpret the Word of God by applying the eternal truth of the Gospel to the concrete circumstances in the life of the congregation (cf. PO 4).

b. Jesus and prayer from the Scriptures

We see this pattern played out at the synagogue in Nazareth when Jesus reads the text from the prophet Isaiah, “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me” (61:1-2), and then he proceeds to interpret, “Today this Scripture passage is fulfilled in your hearing” (Lk 4:21). First, he proclaimed the Scriptures, then he explained its relevance by showing how it was being fulfilled in the works that he was accomplishing. Similarly, when John the Baptist sends two of his disciples to ask Jesus if he is “the one who is to come, or should we look for another” (Lk 7:19), he responds by indicating how he is fulfilling Isaiah’s prophetic description of the Messiah as the one “gives sight to the blind, who heals the lowly and the brokenhearted, and who preaches Good News to the poor” (Is 61:1-2; Lk 7:22). Once again Jesus uses the Scriptures to interpret the significance of what he is doing, and in this way he explains the meaning of what is taking place as the fulfillment of God’s promise made through the prophet.

c. Leo Dehon and the way of reading the Scriptures

Several of Leo Dehon’s spiritual writings are in the form of meditations on the gospels. Typically they follow the same format: (1) Reading of the scriptural text; (2) a Meditation which reflects on the meaning and implications of the text; (3) a Prayer requesting the grace exemplified in the text; and (4) a Resolution to cooperate with the grace that the Lord bestows in order to embody this teaching and put it into practice. This is an apostolic adaptation of the traditional monastic form of prayer known as “Lectio Divina,” which is a prayerful reading of the scriptures.

d. Leo Dehon and his practice of prayer

In the early 1860s when he was studying law in Paris Leo Dehon shared an apartment with his friend Leo Palustre. After a brief description of their comfortable lodgings and artistic decor, he writes: “We loved work. We got up at five o’clock and began our day with a half hour of Scripture reading, using the commentaries of Dom Calmet” (NHV 2/3). There are several things worth noting here. First, there is the commitment to a regular time and form of prayer every day. One of the first rules of prayer is that a set time should be reserved every day for this activity. Then secondly, the fact that they used the Scriptures for their prayer is noteworthy during a era when Catholics were more likely to use prayer books and devotions rather than read the bible. Thirdly, their form of praying – a slow, audible, meditative reading of a text of scripture – is an adaptation of the traditional monastic practice of “Lectio divina,” where the mind focuses on a passage in the bible and reads it over slowly, repeatedly, mouthing the words so that they fall on our ears and sink into our hearts like a gentle, soaking rain (cf. Is 55:10-11). This approach stood in sharp contrast to the

modern innovation of “mental prayer” which, as the name implies, was an intellectual effort involving systematic reflection on a religious or scriptural idea.

e. Leo Dehon and the aim of meditation: Union with Christ

A few years later, after Leo had entered the French Seminary in Rome, he wrote that he had, at first, applied himself to the method of mental prayer, “but following the advice that Father Freyd gave me to tend toward union with our Lord, I preferred to choose topics related to the mysteries of our Lord. When the topic which was read to us related to a virtue, I could only consider this virtue as it was in our Lord himself. This habit gradually led me to prayer of affection” (NHV 5/7). This goal of “union with our Lord” sums up the principal aim and purpose of all that Leo Dehon did in his life. Over and over again he never tires of repeating that his whole reason for living is to grow in intimate union with Jesus Christ. Everything else is secondary and is only a means to advance in this never-ending quest of being more deeply and more lovingly at one with God in Christ. In order to achieve this goal in prayer he is led to make Jesus the exclusive object of his meditation. He should be our “sole model . . . whatever virtue you study, view it as exemplified in the life of Jesus. By these means you will arrive, without effort, at the point of spending your life in his Heart, for he will be the sole object of your thoughts, your preoccupations, your memory, your affections” (VAM 312 & 314).

Discussion questions:

- Have you ever meditated? What was your experience?
- How would you fit a time of meditation into your life?

2. Method of meditation

a. Stay with the mysteries of Christ’s life

Thus the goal of union with Christ will be best achieved by meditating on the mysteries of his life as they are revealed to us in the Scriptures. It begins by reflecting on a topic, though now not just any truth or mystery of the faith, but a concrete instance in the life of Jesus. In the prayer of affection it is important not to try to manipulate the scene, not to be a stage manager or to ask too many questions. Rather, we should allow the passage to speak to us, allow it to present its case and make its opening statement to us. Father Dehon often spoke of looking at or gazing at the scene. He used the image of the artist’s canvas: we should be like a blank canvas as the Lord stands before us and imprints his wisdom and his attitudes, his mind and his heart on us (cf. CAM 1/10, 19 & 20). The first movement in the prayer of affection is from God to us. This is typical of all the instances of divine communication in the Bible: first, the Lord takes the initiative and calls, then the faithful servant replies, “Speak, Lord, your servant listens.” (1Sam 3:9) This is the pattern of all the prophetic calls in the Scriptures.

b. Listen to the Scriptures

So the first stage of this kind of prayer consists of slow reading and rereading of the scripture passage, mulling over it attentively, listening to what it has to say to us. Dehon said: “Nourish yourself on Holy Scripture. Be supple, docile, obedient in the hands of God. Let yourself be led to our Lord by the will rather than by the intellect” (VAM 300-301). He said that the sentiments which animated Jesus during his life ought to be the same ones that move and inspire us. And it is in

prayer above all that we ought to study them. We ought to probe his sentiments and thoughts, we ought to sound out his desires and his will, his joys and sorrows, in order to conform our thoughts, words, and actions completely to his (cf. DSP 260; STD XXX, 33). After the gospel scene begins to speak to us and draws our attention to what Jesus is saying or how he is acting, then the second phase of the prayer begins. The words and actions of Jesus call for a response on our part.

c. Pray with affection

Throughout Christian history the saints and the spiritual writers have taught that prayer is not the words on the lips but the affection in the heart. Saint Ignatius of Loyola said, “It is not by knowing a great deal that the soul is filled and satisfied, but by feeling and savoring things interiorly” (*Spiritual Exercises*, n. 2). And Saint Teresa of Avila taught “that in order to profit by this path and ascend to the dwelling places we desire, the important thing is not to think much but to love much; and so do that which best stirs you to love” (*The Interior Castle*, 4,1.7). This kind of prayer is a meditation enhanced by feelings or affections, where the will and love tend to take the place of the workings of the intellect. The prayer begins by looking at a passage from scripture, then we are to respond to the gospel scene by making acts of faith, hope, love, admiration, thanksgiving, etc. The one who prays wants to participate in the scene he is contemplating, and he stays as long as possible with the feeling that has touched him the most. He pauses at the sight of a simple event in the life of Jesus, and the heart becomes attached to an affection or feeling that gently keeps it occupied. The immediate purpose here is to allow the heart to be touched, to bring about sentiments that well up and lead the person to act. We strive to increase the love of God in our heart, and so we focus on the moving and consoling aspects of the Christian faith.

Father Dehon told the novices, “Above all we must insist on the affections at the end of the meditation. The heart plays its role here, and with us the heart ought to be predominant because we are dedicated to imitate the Heart of Jesus” (CFL 3/54). He said that “prayer of affection” should be common to all those who are devoted to the Sacred Heart. “In this state the soul is quickly responsive to a movement of affection which turns it toward our Lord. This movement comes from grace and . . . is a movement of joy or sadness which results from meditating on the mysteries. It is always a movement of love” (VAM 276-277; cf. NHV 5/8).

d. Affection is to lead to action

The point of these affections is not simply to experience warm and loving feelings. The Lord “appreciates this affection for the effects it produces, much more than for the lively sentiments it inspires” (VAM 233). The affection of the heart that the Lord asks for “leads to action and to generosity . . . One must guard against the appearance of sentiments by which some people deceive themselves. One should not attach importance to a certain fervor which is no more durable than a bit of straw and produces nothing lasting. The sign by which one recognizes the value of true sentiment is the good works which it inspires. . . I ask for an affection which inspires action, an action sustained by affection. Such should be the character of the faithful and of the religious consecrated to [Christ’s] heart” (VAM 492).

Saint Francis de Sales has carefully outlined the role and place of the affections in Christian prayer and life. It all begins with an idea or the “application of the understanding,” as he put it. This work of the mind is carried out in order to move the affections, and the affections are aroused for the resolutions, and the resolutions are made in order to be put into practice, and the practice leads to

the accomplishment of the will of God, which ought to be the foundation and fulfillment of our soul. The habitual striving to do God's will results in a serious commitment to live the Christian life, which is the kind of remote preparation that is needed in order to pray. And so the circle is unbroken: from prayer which enables Christian living, to Christian living that facilitates prayer.

e. The Sulpician method of prayer

Another way to describe the movement of this prayer is summed up in the formula of the "Sulpician Method."³³ It is proposed as "an easy method," which also is in keeping with the plan that God the Father had formerly expressed in the Law. It consists in having our Lord before our eyes, in our heart, and in our hands. This is the way that God proposed that his Chosen People should carry the Law with them: "Let these words be in your *heart*. Bind them to your hand as a sign, and let them hang and swing before your *eyes*" (Dt 6:6,8). Christianity consists in these three points, and it contains the whole method of prayer: that is, to look at Jesus, to unite ourselves to Jesus, and to act in Jesus . . .

i. Step one

After the usual preparatory steps, this prayer begins with what is called "adoration" (Jesus before my eyes). Reflecting on a gospel passage, "we are penetrated by the action of Christ, by his word that we desire to meditate, admiring and adoring it for everything that faith can discover in it." "After our heart has expressed freely its love, praise and other duties, let us remain for a while in silence before him, with these same dispositions and religious sentiments in the depth of our soul."

ii. Step two

The second step is called "communion" (Jesus drawn into my heart). We wait and hope that Christ will give to us what we have contemplated and admired in him. We desire and aspire toward what is proposed to us in Christ. We will give ourselves over to him in order to be possessed and enlivened by his power. After this we will spend some time with him in silence to allow ourselves to be saturated interiorly with his divine balm.

iii. Step three

Then, we go on to the third and final part, our "cooperation" (Jesus in our hands). In the presence of God and relying on his grace, we make some practical resolutions to bring into our life what we have adored and loved in Christ. We must be submissive to him who is our head and should experience no other movement than that prompted in us by Jesus Christ, who is our life and our all. [*At this point the leader should reprise "Day by Day."*]

This is an apt description of what Leo Dehon meant by "prayer of affection," and some of the reasons why it was his usual method of prayer. Now let us examine how he applied this way of reading Scripture in his meditations on Christ's passion and death.

³³ Jean-Jacques Olier, *Catéchisme Chrétien Pour la Vie Intérieure*. Paris: Le Rameau, 1954, pp. 71-74. ET: *Bérulle and the French School*. Ed., William M. Thompson. Tr., Lowell M. Glendon. New York: Paulist Press, 1989, pp. 228-232. Cf., Louis Bouyer, *Introduction to Spirituality*. Tr., Mary Perkins Ryan. New York: Desclee Company, 1961, pp. 84-85.

Reflection questions:

- What do you find most helpful or most difficult in the Sulpician method of meditation?
- Go on line to the *Oeuvres Spirituels* of Leo Dehon and read one of his meditations. What strikes you as you read the meditation?

3. How Leo Dehon read the Passion of Christ

a. The outer and the inner

The following is taken from Leo Dehon's meditation entitled "The Devotion to the Sacred Heart has a Double Object: The Heart of Flesh of the Savior and His Love for Us" (ASC 6/17-25: 1 June). He begins with the observation that in the revelations to Margaret Mary Christ always showed her his Heart of flesh, but likewise always called her attention to his love: "Behold this Heart that has loved men so much..." Thus there are two elements in this meditation: a sense object – the heart of flesh – and a spiritual object that is represented and evoked by the heart of flesh. But the two elements are really one, just as in the sacraments the external sign really contains what is signified. The two elements are united like body and soul, and both are essential. We are always shown the totally loving and lovable heart of Jesus, and it is proposed to us for our adoration. But it is always necessary to go from the external element to the internal or spiritual element, from the outward sign to the inner reality that it signifies. This is a very important principle in Dehon's entire approach to Christ.

b. The inner and the outer in the Passion of Christ

i. Penetrate to my very Heart

To keep matters as simple as possible, this presentation has only one theme, only one key idea. The following is a passage from one of Dehon's meditations in *The Life of Love*. Jesus is speaking to a disciple in this meditation and he says: "In the mysteries of my Passion, I am truly a book written within and without (Rev 5:1), and what is written there is my love. The whips, the thorns, the nails have written it in letters of blood on my divine flesh. Do not be content to read and admire this divine writing on the outside. Penetrate to my very Heart and you will see a still greater marvel which is love itself, the inexhaustible love that considers all that it suffers as nothing and which gives itself without ever tiring.

"It is the vocation of souls devoted to my Heart to always strive to discover my love under the surface of all the mysteries, and where is this more evident than in my Passion? If you do not see it there, or see it only superficially, you will draw little benefit from these great mysteries of suffering and little glory will be given to God.

My Passion derives all its value, all its merit, not so much from my external sufferings, but from my Heart, from the love which inspired my sacrifice. I wished to endure these extraordinary sufferings in order to prove my love and to spare nothing in order to gain your love in return. Since I committed myself to my Father to suffer everything for you, I fulfilled a vow of love in all the circumstances of my Passion" (VAM 114-116).

ii. Do not limit yourselves to the outside

Several ideas are contained in that passage, but the key idea, the one which unlocks his fundamental approach to the Passion of Christ, is his instruction that when we meditate on Christ's sufferings

and death we should not limit ourselves to the external factors – the whips, the thorns, the nails – but we should look within these events and discover Christ’s attitudes, his intentions, his feelings, his motives. This idea is not the only thing that he has to say about Christ’s Passion, but it is one of the most important and it is characteristic of his understanding of Christ and of his appreciation of what our Lord has done for us.

The idea of reading the Passion as a book that has an external meaning and an inner meaning is found in the New Testament book of Revelation (5: 1): “Then I saw in the right hand of the one seated on the throne a scroll written on the inside and on the back, sealed with seven seals” [NRSV]. Other translations speak of “a scroll with writing on both sides” [RSV, NAB], or “written on front and back” [NJB]. In any case, the idea expressed here is typical of Johannine theology, viz., that external events in the material world have an inner and spiritual meaning. And Leo Dehon was very taken with this method of interpreting the scriptures. There are at least a dozen places in his published writings where he uses this metaphor and applies it to Christ’s Passion.

c. *Borne by love*

i. *Love symbolized by the Heart*

So this is the theme: the externals of Christ’s Passion are signs that point to a deeper inner meaning. There are several implications which can be drawn from this interpretive principle. First, the Passion of Christ draws its value and is effective and meritorious not primarily because of his external sufferings, and not even because of his death; rather, Christ’s Passion draws its effectiveness and value from his love, the love of God-made-man, which is symbolized by his Heart and which led him to give himself to us without reserve. Then secondly, it could be asked, what is the point of these extraordinary physical sufferings if Christ’s love for us would have been just as great if he had redeemed us by some minimal effort? Dehon suggests that Christ’s extraordinary sufferings not only show us the evil and the hideousness of sin, but they also are a more effective way to reveal the extent of his love and of his intention to spare nothing to win our love in return. In this way we cannot be left unmoved by the sight of the *Ecce Homo* and we become more easily convinced that Christ wanted to win our love by any means necessary (CAM 2/13). He wrote: “This is the secret of Jesus. He could have redeemed us without the suffering of his scourging, but he wanted to win our hearts at least by moving us to have pity for him. Christ once said to a mystic, ‘All these wounds are like so many mouths asking for your love’” (CAM 2/112).

ii. *Death on the cross and the piercing of his side*

The principal episode of Christ’s Passion that Dehon reads both from the outside and from within is his death on the cross and the subsequent piercing of his side by the soldier’s lance. Obviously, all the gospels and Christian tradition focus on his death as the culmination of Jesus’ life and the fulfillment of his work. But for Leo Dehon it is “the greatest mystery of love” when “the Lord dies on the cross” (CAM 2/183).

At this point he uses the Gospel of John almost exclusively, for more than any of the other gospels John’s is suited to be read on two levels: the external events point to an inner meaning. For example, the gospel describes the soldier piercing Jesus’ side with his lance, and then a solemn note is added calling the reader’s attention to the importance of this event: “And he who saw it has borne witness, and his witness is true; and he knows that he is speaking the truth, so that you may [come to] believe” (Jn 19:35). Dehon comments that the solemn testimony of the eye witness indicates that

what is at issue here is a matter of faith surpassing any human reasoning. “The opening of the Heart of Jesus is the mystery of mysteries, the foundation of all others, the mystery of love foreseen in the preceding ages and now clearly revealed to us” (CAM 2/193).

Then he asks rhetorically: What is the meaning of this opening? And he answers his own question with a quotation from Saint Bernard which sums up the whole tradition: “He was wounded so that his visible wounds would reveal the invisible wound of love” (CAM 2/194). John’s gospel interprets the wound in Christ’s side by making reference to a quotation from Zachariah (12:10): “This happened so that the scripture passage might be fulfilled . . . ‘They will look upon him whom they have pierced.’” Dehon wrote several commentaries on this passage, often blending the traditional teachings of the Fathers of the Church with distinctive elements of the devotion to the Sacred Heart. I will quote one of them at some length because it provides us with some of his clearest and most developed thinking on this topic.

“They will look within the one whom they have pierced”. – The words of the prophet Zachariah are recalled by Saint John. The prophet did not say: ‘They will see the one they have pierced,’ but ‘they will see inside the one whom they have pierced: *Videbunt in quem transfixerunt*’ (Jn 19: 38).³⁴ Saint John applies these words to the opening in the side of Jesus; he had to be thinking of the interior of Jesus, of his very Heart which he could catch a glimpse of through the gaping wound in the side.

“This wound opens up the Heart of Jesus and delivers it to us. In a spiritual sense, it is there that we can read of the love which gave its all, even its life. In this same love, we recognize the motive and the end of all the divine works: God created us, redeemed us, and sanctified us by love. In the Heart of Jesus we enter into the very essence of the divine nature in its most wonderful manifestation. ‘God is love.’ Saint John read that in the Heart of Jesus. I need to contemplate this wound to see how much I am loved and how much I ought to love in return. There I will learn how a loving heart ought to act, ought to suffer, ought to give all, even to death, for God and for souls.

“Let us go even more deeply, and let us see all that this most gentle heart has suffered... All sorrows came together in this Heart and overwhelm it. It has experienced all these things and it has sanctified all of them. In our pains, as extreme as they may be, let us have confidence in the sympathy and compassion of this Heart, who wanted to be like us in suffering in order to be more compassionate and merciful: ‘Because he himself was tested by what he suffered, he is able to help those who are being tested’ (Hb 2:18). Let us begin by having pity on this love which is not loved and by sharing in his sorrows.

“The opening of the Heart of Jesus reminds us of his love, his goodness, his suffering. He expects love in return from me, as well as gratitude and compassion. Here I am, Lord, to live with you and in you. No longer allow me to be separated from you and to forget you” (ASC 3/423-427).

Looking back over Leo Dehon’s “reading” of the Passion of Christ it is possible to detect a dynamic at work which is characteristic of his whole approach to the spiritual life. It could be summed up in a scholastic adage which is derived from Saint Augustine: *Ab exterioribus ad interiora, ab*

³⁴ “The evangelist used a suggestive [*vigilans*] word so that he did not say ‘pierced’ or ‘wounded’ His side, or anything else, but ‘opened,’ so that there, in a manner of speaking, the door of life was thrown open, from which have flowed forth the sacraments of the Church, without which there is no entrance to the life which is the true life.” (Augustine, *Homilies on the Gospel of John*, Tractate 120, 2).

interioribus ad superiora (From the exterior to the interior, from the interior to the superior).³⁵ He begins by contemplating the exterior elements but he reads them as signs and indicators which point him to the interior drama which is unfolding in the human mind and heart of Christ. From there he discovers that Christ's human dispositions and attitudes are a window on the heart and mind of God. Imitation of Christ and following in his footsteps is more a matter of union with his interior intentions and motivation than conformity to the exterior aspects of his ordeal. This way of transformation and conversion is open to everyone.

iii. Not too literal a reading

In his effort to relativize the role of physical suffering, he warns against the danger of an overly literal reading of the gospels. When he cites Jesus' command that his disciple must carry his cross and follow him, Father Dehon cautions that this "does not mean that all of us should die on the gallows" (ASC 9/13) or physically endure scourging, thorns, or crucifixion. Rather, Jesus says that we are to carry our cross *every day* (Lk 9:23), so it is a matter of daily, metaphorical crosses: being faithful to carrying out our duties, struggling against our passions, accepting the trials that Providence sends us (see ASC 8/201). We should not seek out exceptional hardships or mortifications on our own. It is characteristic of genuine disciples to allow the Lord to determine the manner, the time, and the duration of their sacrifice. In this way his followers are faithful to the example of Jesus who "did not crucify himself, but allowed himself to be crucified."³⁶

Dehon considered this attitude to be one of the characteristics of the devotion to the Sacred Heart. He wrote: "The special purpose of the devotion to the Sacred Heart is not to imitate the Savior in His external sufferings, at least not in a direct way. The friends of the Sacred Heart do not have to impose the mortifications and terrible penances of the Fathers of the desert upon themselves. Rather, they ought to strive to come close to the Sacred Heart, and as a consequence, they will be filled with loving gratitude and compassion. Dispositions such as these will prompt them to accept physical suffering generously, if Divine Providence sends it to them" (CAM 2/139).

He concludes this discussion with the advice: "Let us accept our crosses such as they are. When you have a cross, do not wish to exchange it for another; accept it as it is... Respond to all that Providence asks of you. Your dispositions will be perfect if you do not love suffering for the sake of suffering, nor the cross for the sake of the cross, but love the Sacred Heart of Jesus who willed to send you these sufferings or those crosses... This was the attitude of our Lord toward his Father. *Ecce venio!* Here I am, ready to do your will" (CAM 2/142).

C. Testimony

Have you ever experienced the feelings of being a stranger? Of being on the "outside looking in," of feeling like you are excluded with no options in sight for a future?

Janet's sobs were palpable. Her body seemed wrapped in excruciating pain. Sitting beside her, Sister Barbara gently put her arm around Janet's shoulders. Separated from her children during the genocide in Rwanda, Janet had been forced to flee the country, leaving her five children behind. Now she was in Toronto, gathered with others at the Becoming Neighbours workspace for a workshop on how to sponsor family members to Canada. She heard the "nitty gritty" aspects of

³⁵ *De Trinitate*, Bk. 14, Ch. 5: "Nempe ab inferioribus ad superiora ascendentes, vel ab exterioribus ad interiora ingredientes."

³⁶ Letter to John Guillaume, 18 February 1913 (B 44/7. Invent. No. 751.38). For an English translation of this letter, see, Paul J. McGuire, *Three Letters and a Note*. Franklin, WI: The Dehon Study Center, 1997, pp. 8-10.

what it would take to be reunited with her children: \$550 per adult processing fee (\$150 for those under 22 years of age) to apply to be a permanent resident, then the cost for DNA testing for each child to prove parenthood, then cost of each child's medical exam, and finally the cost of repayment of government sponsored travel to Canada. Her sobs became louder and louder with Barbara sitting in solidarity beside her.

Appalled by the plight of refugees and persons with no documentation, and challenged by their suffering and situations of injustice, 20 Roman Catholic women and men religious congregations established Becoming Neighbours, a Joint Apostolic Ministry in April 2006. Each participating congregation already had a rich history of accompanying and responding to the unmet needs of immigrants. Becoming Neighbours was a conscious choice to walk collectively and collaboratively in the footsteps of our forbearers in response to the new and urgent needs of the refugees of our times. Presence, prayer and solidarity are the underpinnings of the ministry of Becoming Neighbours. This is a companion program in which refugees, during their initial adjustment to Canadian society, are matched with members of religious congregations, their associates and friends. Becoming Neighbours promotes two-way cultural enrichment and sharing while accompanying refugees to become active members of the community.

Janet and Barbara bear witness to the mutual transformation and even reconciliation that occur when practical hospitality and a welcoming attitude create the mutual space as a response to the generosity and graciousness of God with us. In the first meeting to arrange the "match", there is an initial excitement of anticipation and also of uncertainty: who is this new person? What will we do or share together? What will this relationship become? As we mutually share some of our stories, we recognize some things we have in common and become curious and appreciative of the things that are different; we begin to relax and see each other in a more nuanced, complex way. We see each other as being human and not so "other" after all.

One of the most beautiful profound examples of transformation evolving out of an encounter between a refugee and companion involves a seminarian doing his ministry placement and being matched with a family of government sponsored Syrian refugees. Pawel was quiet and reserved in personality, but also thoughtful, kind, and open to the experience. Nidal and Fatima and their children with whom we matched Pawel were dynamic and full of life, so joyful and thankful to start a new life in Canada! As they got to know each other, the friendly and gregarious energy and hospitality of the family drew out the best in Pawel and brought him an experience of joy, love and compassion for the family. In turn, Fatima and Nidal came to see him as their "brother", their friend, a person they could trust with questions and concerns and with whom they could just enjoy spending time. Both were drawn out of themselves to enter into a richer experience of life and connection; all felt like their world had expanded and was enhanced by the presence of the other.

Being a companion doesn't take great skills, talents, or energy; all that is required are eyes always open, ears to listen, spirit alert and a heart open to understanding and expanding its circle of love. Companion accompany refugees as they struggle to find their way, finding ways to celebrate small successes, being voices for the voiceless, being agents of "tough love", when necessary and being beacons of hope in the midst of the darkness. As Pope Francis reminds us, "the culture of encounter denounces exclusion and isolation. It proclaims relationship and the equal dignity imbued in each and every person who is the image and lightness of God," We have discovered that if we enter into this encounter in humility, coming just as we are in God's love with grace for ourselves, our limitations and for the intricacies of the refugee we accompany, then we will discover the joy that

something beautiful can grow in the space created. It won't be perfect or easy, necessarily, but it will have the potential to be profoundly transformative. The only way to know is to experience it for yourself!

Fr. Peter McKenna scj (Becoming Neighbours: Toronto, Ontario, Canada)

D. Group discussion and sharing

Discuss with one another (a) your impressions of Fr. Dehon's method of meditation, (b) go back to some of the questions interspersed in the presentation of his method; (c) try to summarize together how Fr. Dehon sought to bring his members to union with Christ. What is the role of the imagination? What is the role of the affections?

E. A Moment of Prayer

(Leader) With faith and trust, we entrust to God the concerns of our hearts and the needs of those who follow Fr. Dehon in his path

V/ Loving God, we pray for your Church, for its leaders and all its members

R/ Guide us as followers of Fr. Dehon; may we always build up your kingdom in the heart of the Church and so look forward to your rule in its fulfilment.

V/ All powerful God, we pray for all those followers of Fr. Dehon who are sent on mission for from home for the sake of the kingdom, especially for those who find themselves in places of political, religious or social violence:

R/ May their ministries of word, sacrament and action bring about justice and reconciliation, and so embody the life of Jesus for all.

V/ Gracious God, we pray for young men and women everywhere:

R Inspire them to judge rightly the attractions of this world, and grant that many will offer their lives for your people as lay ministers, religious, priests and brothers.

V/ God of righteousness, challenge us with the courage of your grace:

R Enable us to proclaim your truth boldly wherever we find intolerance, impiety, or social injustice.

V/ Merciful God, as we seek to live the charism of Fr. Dehon, heal disunity and bring together all who are inspired by Fr. Dehon

R make our lives more fully a sign of your presence, a witness to your reconciliation, and a reflection of your love in the world.

A blessing

V/ Blessed be God, our Father.

R/ Blessed forever.

V/ Blessed be the Son, the Word made flesh.

R/ Blessed forever.

V/ Blessed be Jesus, from whose open heart comes eternal life.

R/ Blessed forever.

V/ Blessed be the Holy Spirit, Gift of God and Paraclete.

R/ Blessed forever.

V/ Blessed be the Virgin Mary, who bore God for our salvation.

R/ Blessed forever.

V/ Blessed be the beloved disciple, who bore witness to the pierced Heart of Christ.

R/ Blessed forever.

May the gracious God bless us, protect us from all evil and bring us to everlasting life.

All: Amen.

Literature

Meeting XXXVIII

LEO DEHON AND CONTEMPLATION

Objectives of the Meeting

- To examine the dynamic of Leo Dehon’s spiritual life in the alternating influence of contemplation and action;
- To examine the theological sources that influenced his spirituality and to indicate their enduring relevance;
- To indicate some of the scriptural sources which inform his spiritual teaching and provide the inspiration “to go and do likewise.”

Structure of the Meeting

- a. To examine the dynamic of Leo Dehon’s spiritual life in the alternating influence of contemplation and action;
- b. To examine the theological sources that influenced his spirituality and to indicate their enduring relevance;
- c. To indicate some of the scriptural sources which inform his spiritual teaching and provide the inspiration “to go and do likewise.”

Development of the Meeting

A. Welcome

Fr. Dehon often complained that all his activities did not permit him to find the quiet for contemplation. In this theme we will examine what is meant by contemplation and how we might enter into the mode of contemplation. Begin the session by asking the participants what they understand by contemplation and if they consider themselves a contemplative person.

A word from the bible (Luke 2.15-19)

¹⁵ When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, ‘Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us.’ ¹⁶ So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger. ¹⁷ When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child; ¹⁸ and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them. ¹⁹ But Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart.

A word from Dehon

Leo Dehon imagines Jesus saying:

“I ask for an affection that leads to action, and an action that is sustained by affection. This should be the character of the faithful and the Religious who are devoted to my Heart” (VAM 492).

B. Reflection on the theme

The theme of this presentation is: *contemplata tradere*: “to pass on to others what you have contemplated”. This is the phrase that Saint Thomas Aquinas used to describe the vocation of vowed Religious: *contemplata aliis tradere* – to let in others in what you have experienced in your contemplation. (STh II-II, q.188, a.6). Leo Dehon made explicit reference to this passage of St. Thomas in his *Summa theologiae* – his magisterial summary of theology – on at least two occasions. At the beginning of his fourth year in the seminary, when Leo Dehon was preoccupied with the need to renew and strengthen theological studies in France, he drew up a precise and detailed list of readings that could contribute to this revival, including mention of this specific article in the *Summa* (NHV 6/139). Then 25 years later, during his thirty-day retreat at Braisne, in a meditation describing Christ’s apostolic life of preaching, he wrote: “It is the mixed life, the active life united to the contemplative life, that is the most perfect” (RB 88 = NQT 6/139). These words have become the motto of the Dominicans, the Religious order to which Aquinas belonged. And more recently this phrase has also been adopted by the Second Vatican Council which expanded its scope by applying it to all priests (PO 13). This was the dynamic approach to living a Christ-like life that Leo Dehon bequeathed to his Religious. But he wanted to leave this life to the laity as well. In this session we will explore what this might mean for those who follow Dehon not as religious but as baptized Christians. We will enter into the meaning of contemplation by examining the place of contemplation in the teachings of Scripture, the Fathers of the Church, several contemporary theologians, and in Dehon’s own writings. Leo Dehon had a deep thirst for the life of contemplation. But what is its meaning for us?

Contemplation and Action

1. The setting of Contemplation

a. Between Mary Magdalene and Ignatius of Loyola

When Leo Dehon finally received the letter from the Bishop of Soissons giving him permission to found a Congregation, he made a retreat. He always saw great symbolic significance in the fact that this retreat began on July 22, 1877 and it ended on July 31st; that is to say, it went from the feast of Saint Mary Magdalene until the feast of Saint Ignatius Loyola.

As you may already know, Mary Magdalene has *traditionally* been considered as a model of the contemplative life, although there is little in the Gospels that associates her with the practice of contemplation. She is, however, clearly identified by name in each of the Gospels. In Luke’s gospel she is the woman from whom Jesus cast out seven demons, and she and some other women are described as accompanying Jesus and the disciples on their journeys, ministering to them from their own resources (Luke 8.2-3). In Mark she is one of the three women who is an eye witnesses to the crucifixion (Mk 15.40). In Medieval and Renaissance art she is often portrayed at the foot of the cross, swooning in ecstasy. She is also one of the three women who discovers the empty tomb and hears the angelic announcement of the resurrection (Mk 16.1). And both Matthew (28.9) and John (20:11ff) tell us that Jesus appeared to her later that same day.

By the third century, however, much of Christian preaching was also identifying her with the nameless sinner who was forgiven when she washed Jesus’ feet with her tears and anointed them with perfumed oil (Luke 7.36-50). Already in John’s Gospel (12.3) Luke’s nameless woman had

been identified as Mary, the sister of Martha and Lazarus. And most significantly of all, by the time of Gregory the Great, this unnamed woman was invariably identified as Mary, the sister of Martha and Lazarus, who sat at Jesus' feet, intently listening to his word, totally absorbed with his presence, while her sister was busy about many things (Luke 10.38-42). This composite picture of Mary Magdalene was almost universally accepted until the liturgical changes that were made after the Second Vatican Council. And with Pope Francis her feast now ranks with that of the apostles.

When these additional roles were attributed to Mary Magdalene, together with her presence on Calvary and her encounter with the Risen Lord, she quite naturally became the Christian role model for contemplation. For Leo Dehon as well, whose prayer was focused on the pierced side of Christ, Magdalene was the ideal disciple of the Sacred Heart. She sat at Christ's feet listening to him, she followed him to Calvary and saw the blood and water flowing from his side, and she went looking for him "very early in the morning on the first day of the week" (John 20.1). So, Dehon writes, like Magdalene, we too should go looking for him with an eager and attentive love, and we should "offer him the perfume of our affection and our compassion." But then he adds this pertinent observation: "We cannot always be with him in prayer, so let us also serve him in his brethren. Jesus told her: 'Go to my brothers and tell them of my resurrection'" (cf. John 20.17). So likewise we should go to the people to help them, to edify them, and to carry out some apostolic activity on their behalf (ASC 7/220). So here in this case, Leo begins with the "traditional image" of Magdalene as the model of contemplation, but then he recognizes that her contemplation of Jesus is followed by his instructions that she should also engage in an apostolic mission. Because Jesus sends her to his "brothers" to announce his resurrection, she has also traditionally been given the title of "the apostle to the Apostles." Thus she goes from contemplation to action: *Contemplata tradere*.

On the other hand, when Dehon's retreat comes to an end on July 31st, it is the feast of Ignatius Loyola, the founder of the Jesuits who greatly influenced Leo Dehon all his life. Traditionally, Ignatius is usually presented as the model of apostolic zeal. Ignatius had summed up the entire purpose of the Society of Jesus in the simple phrase "to help souls." But Jerome Nadal, one of his first companions, described Ignatius with the apt phrase "*contemplativus in actione*," a contemplative in action; and this has become the ideal – and the unofficial motto – of every Jesuit: to be a contemplative in action. In a similar way, by meditating on the sufferings of Christ, Leo Dehon said that we ought to join our compassion for Christ together with our zeal for souls. He wrote: "For us in the active life, the apostolate is our primary and immediate purpose... However, we should have a great enough love for the Sacred Heart to embrace the life of sacrifice and privation that the care of our neighbor requires... For this reason, missionaries need to continually live on Calvary with the cross of Christ firmly planted in their heart. Above all, they should generously accept the crosses that Providence sends them along the way. These are favorable opportunities to make their ministry fruitful" (CAM 1/186). In this instance it is apostolic activity that leads him back to the necessity for compassionate contemplation of Christ.

b. Leo Dehon's contemplation in action

Thus, for Dehon, contemplating the mystery of divine love as it was revealed in the scandal and the glory of the cross became *both* the source of his interior life of prayerful union with Christ *and* the wellspring that nurtured and matured his efforts to establish the reign of God in souls and in societies. This was a major theme not only in the books he wrote, but also in the way he lived his life. He was that rare combination of mystic and missionary, a man whose lifelong, intense, interior

prayer had to express itself in unwavering apostolic activity on behalf of the One who loved him and whom he loved in return with all his heart and soul and strength. In a meditation on Jesus' activities during his final week in Jerusalem he wrote: "The good Master puts all his energies into his final days. During the daytime he preaches in the temple: 'Daily he was in the temple teaching' (Luke 19.47). At night he withdraws to the Mount of Olives to pray (Luke 21.32)... This is how [Jesus] teaches us to unite contemplation to action!" (RB 107 = NQT 6/150).

c. The lay Dehonian and contemplation in action

So that is the dynamic that is we wish to consider: a movement from contemplation that leads to action, AND apostolic activity that embodies Christ's love and invites others to come to know and experience the boundless love that God has for them. In one of his published meditations Dehon imagines Christ speaking to him in these words: "The affection of the heart that I am asking for leads to action and generosity. Those who love me listen to my word and bring their actions into conformity with it... I ask for an affection that leads to action, and an action that is sustained by affection. This should be the character of the faithful and the Religious who are devoted to my Heart" (VAM 492).

d. Theological approaches to the mystery of Christ

In addition to following the movement and rhythm of Leo Dehon's spiritual life, we should also direct our attention to some of the theological resources that he used to construct his approach to the mystery of Christ. While our primary intention is to explain the mutual interrelationship of contemplation and action, in addition to this, it must not be forgotten that his spirituality is solidly based on sound theological foundations. This is particularly important for those living in secular environments where many of the social supports that reinforced Christian belief in the past have been greatly reduced and may even have completely disappear in some places. In some countries where more or less everyone publicly professed the same beliefs and participated in the same liturgical and sacramental practices, it almost seemed that the individual was not burdened with the responsibility of making a personal decision to believe. The Christian faith was like the common language which everyone spoke, it was the climate that everyone lived in. Today the situation is vastly different. For many people that world, with its social reinforcements on behalf of the Christian faith, no longer exists.

Dominican theologian Yves Congar used a helpful image to illustrate the consequences that this change has brought about. He noted that some animals -- turtles and tortoises, for example -- lacking an internal skeleton, had to develop an outer shell that surrounded and protected them. These animals and their protective shell are like Western Christianity in the past where the environment, social pressure, and sometimes even the laws and the power of the state reinforced the Church's belief and its practices. To be a Christian today, however, requires personal conviction, people need a spiritual backbone, an internal skeleton, in order to survive in the modern world. Today we need to be adult Christians, people who are Christians from within. Similarly, Karl Rahner contends: "The Christian of the future will be a mystic or he will not exist at all." By mysticism he is not referring to visions or other extraordinary phenomena, but rather he is referring to a genuine, personal experience of God emerging from the very heart of our existence. The ultimate conviction and decision of faith comes, not from public opinion, and not from the Church; rather, faith comes about as our personal response to the experience of God and his Spirit.

e. *Resources for contemplation: the Heart of Christ*

What Karl Rahner and Yves Congar in the mid-twentieth century began to identify as the characteristics of a future spirituality is what we already find present in Dehonian spirituality. His writings are thoroughly informed by Scripture; they contain over 30,000 citations and references to the bible. They incorporate and develop insights from the Fathers of the Church, particularly, Saint Augustine, as well as medieval mystics and theologians like Saint Bernard and Saint Thomas Aquinas. Throughout his life he was devoted to *The Spiritual Exercises* of Saint Ignatius which he made over thirty times, including the full thirty-day retreat. And, of course, he was steeped in the spirituality of the French School and read widely in their writings. So Dehon's contemporary spirituality is firmly anchored in the old traditional spirituality of the Church.

Despite his personal attraction to popular devotions and mystical phenomena, Leo kept his main focus on the incarnate mystery of the God-Man, Jesus Christ; and for him the ultimate meaning of that mystery was revealed in the pierced heart of Jesus pouring out blood and water, the symbol of God's life-giving love for humanity. Margaret Mary Alacoque can be credited with spreading a popular form of devotion to the Sacred Heart, but her writings and her visions are *not* the foundation for the worship of the Sacred Heart of Jesus.

At a symposium held in Toulouse, France, in 1982 Joseph Ratzinger stated "that Sacred Heart devotion itself is nothing other than a turning to the Easter mystery and that, consequently, it stands in direct relationship to the core of Christian faith." In other words, the devotion to the Sacred Heart brings us into contact with the central Mystery of our faith: the dying and the rising of Jesus. Ratzinger went on to explain that it is "convincingly clear that devotion to the Sacred Heart is ordered to a central biblical reality since it is nothing if not the piety of the paschal mystery . . . [T]he great image of the opened side of Jesus, from which blood and water flowed, [is] the new devotional image, . . . the biblical icon of devotion to the Sacred Heart for all Christianity." Thus, the piercing of Christ's side is not only the culmination of John's gospel – its ultimate "sign" – it is also the climax of the revelation of God's love in the New Testament.

This spirituality is a faith that is characterized by a personal commitment founded on the experience of God in one's own life. Since the social structures that supported and reinforced Christian belief and practice in the past have all but disappeared in many places, from now on the only basis for religious faith lies in our personal loving response to God's gracious presence in our life. This is a major theme in all of Dehon's spiritual works. He wrote: "The interior worship of the Sacred Heart, or the reign of the Sacred Heart in us, first of all requires that we know this divine Heart, and for this we must study it in the life of prayer. When we have learned to know him, it is easy and natural to adore and praise his divine perfections, to love his goodness, and to have compassion for his sufferings and sorrows" (RSC 585). In another reflection Dehon imagines Jesus speaking these words: "My reign is totally interior: 'The Kingdom of God is within you' (Luke 17.21)... I want to live in you and make you into another me: 'Put on the new man. Put on Jesus Christ' (Eph 4.24). For this to happen, you must keep my virtues before your eyes, and follow my inspirations in your hearts" (RSC 381). For Leo Dehon personal, interior union with Christ is the only possible foundation for genuine religious faith today.

2. How to share our contemplation with others

a. *For study or for action?*

Now I want to examine the relationship between these convictions and Dehon's decision to embody them – to make them specific and concrete – in a practical, pastoral program to which he would dedicate his life. In other words, how is he going to hand over to others those things that he has received in contemplation? This will be his personal way of fulfilling Aquinas's ideal of *contemplata tradere*.

In the Spring of 1868 he was completing his third year of theological studies and he was preparing for his ordination to the diaconate in early June. As the fulfillment of his dream of becoming a priest was coming closer, he confided this entry to his personal diary: "I am becoming uneasy over thoughts about the future: Was I destined for study or for action?" (NHV 6/58).

Now, from the way he phrases it, it may seem that he is making the common mistake of considering the contemplative life and the active life as two different institutional forms of life, as alternative lifestyles that are primarily distinguished from each other by their exterior characteristics. For example, the Trappist and Carthusian way of living is clearly contemplative, while the Jesuits and the diocesan clergy are living an active, apostolic life. But this is not how the Fathers of the Church understood this matter. For them the two lives -- the contemplative and the active -- were to be lived by all Christians successively and alternately, as circumstances and needs arise. In other words, all Christians are called to lead BOTH a prayerful, contemplative life AND an active life of apostolic service. And this is precisely how Dehon, the seminarian, understood this. In a meditation he made at this time he characterized our Lord as "dividing his time between prayer and the active life," and he said that Jesus should be our model "in organizing our prayer, our work, and our dealings with our neighbor" (NQT 1/142).

b. *Examples of St. Augustine and St. Gregory*

But to further clarify his thinking and to determine the role of contemplation and action in his life, he also examined two patristic texts, one from Saint Augustine and the other from Saint Gregory the Great; and the two passages that he selected are considered classic texts for determining the place of contemplation and action in a Christian's life (see NHV 6/58).

i. *St. Augustine*

From Augustine he selected a passage in *The City of God*: "As long as faith is preserved, a person can lead any one of these lives and come to the eternal reward. What counts is how he holds to the love of truth and how he weighs the duties of charity. No one should be so contemplative that in his contemplation he does not think of his neighbor's need; no one [should be] so active that he does not seek the contemplation of God" (XIX, 19). So, Augustine is saying, contemplation should lead us on to pastoral and apostolic action, but pastoral activity should always bring us back to contemplation.

ii. *St. Gregory*

And from Pope Gregory the seminarian chose a passage which compares and contrasts the responses of Isaiah and Jeremiah when they were called by the Lord to accept a prophetic mission. When the Lord asks Isaiah, "Whom shall I send?," he responds: "Here I am. Send me" (Is 6.8). But he does this only after he has been cleansed and purified by the burning coal that the angel touched

to his lips (Is 6.5-7). In contrast, when the Lord tells Jeremiah that he has been chosen to speak to the people in God's name, this reluctant prophet claims he is unqualified for the task because he is too young and does not know how to speak properly (Jer 1.5-8). Yet despite his feelings of incompetence, nevertheless he ultimately accepts the divine call to go. As Gregory explains it, although they apparently gave contrasting responses, each of them was motivated by love. For there are two types of affection. Isaiah desired the active life of preaching because he was motivated to be of service to his neighbors. Meanwhile Jeremiah was reluctant to take on the burdens of the active life out of concern that this would lessen his contemplative union with God. But in the end the one who protested did not completely resist, and the one who volunteered to be sent, did so only after he had been cleansed and purified by a coal from the altar. So once again the lesson being taught is that true contemplation leads to apostolic activity, while properly motivated pastoral service must be preceded by contemplation and ultimately lead back to contemplation. This is why, years later, Dehon would write: "Every apostolic life should have a lengthy preparation made up of prayer and study" (CAM 1/198).

c. An example of contemplation in action: Pope Benedict XVI

To make the teachings contained in these two patristic texts less abstract and to illustrate their meaning, let me tell you a story, in fact, let me tell you two stories that blend into one.

In the Spring of 1977 Professor Joseph Ratzinger had finally found an academic home at the University of Regensburg. After a decade of moving from one university to another in search of an environment that was suitable for the calm and serious study of theology, Regensburg became the place that he could call his intellectual and spiritual home. He wrote: "I rejoiced to be able to say something of my own, something new and yet completely within the faith of the Church." "I knew I was called to the scholar's life and never considered anything else" (150-1). Later that Spring when the papal nuncio asked for an appointment to see him, he thought it was to be nothing more than a courtesy call. After exchanging pleasantries for a few moments, the nuncio pressed a letter into Ratzinger's hand and told him to read it and think it over at home. It was his appointment as archbishop of Munich. Ratzinger consulted an older professor who was a mentor and a friend. Much to Ratzinger's surprise his friend immediately replied: "You must accept."

Despite writing his letter of acceptance, the weeks before his consecration as bishop were difficult for Ratzinger; interiorly he was still unsure and he felt as if he was being crushed by a huge burden. In the midst of this uncertainty and inner turmoil he recalled Saint Augustine, whose life and writings had always impressed and inspired him. After his conversion and baptism, Augustine returned to Africa where, in the company of like-minded friends, he intended to lead a life devoted to prayer and study, and he organized a sort of monastic community for that purpose. On a visit to the city of Hippo, however, he was pressured into being ordained a priest and to assist the aging bishop. Then, shortly after his ordination, his bishop died, and once again the local population put pressure on Augustine, this time to become their new bishop.

Quite naturally, Ratzinger understood Augustine's experience in this regard as an exact image of his own situation. Each of them had desired a life of quiet, of study, of contemplation. Then, in turn, the Spirit, speaking through the desires of the people of God, the Church, compelled each of them to take up the burden of being the shepherd of the flock.

In this context Ratzinger recalled Augustine's commentary of Psalm 73:22. The verse reads: "I was stupid and could not understand; I was like a brute beast in your presence." But Augustine

understood the word for “brute beast” somewhat differently. For him it referred primarily to farm animals who worked in the fields, and here he saw an image of himself under the burden of his episcopal service: I became a farm animal working before you, O Lord, yet I was always with you. “[Augustine] had chosen to lead the life of a scholar and a contemplative, but God had chosen to make him into a [farm animal] — a good, sturdy ox to pull God’s cart in the world. He often protested against all the petty business that continually stood in his way and kept him from the great spiritual and intellectual work which he knew was his truest vocation and his deepest calling. But this is where the psalm helps him avoid all bitterness: ‘Yes, indeed, I have become a [farm animal], a beast of burden, an ox, -- and yet this is just the way in which you keep me in your hand.’ Just as the [farm animal] is closest to the farmer doing his work, so is Augustine closest to God precisely through humble service, completely within God’s hands, completely his instrument. He could not be closer to his Lord or be more important to him” (155). Ratzinger concludes his memoirs: “I have carried my load to Rome and have now been wandering the streets of the Eternal City for a long time, I do not know when I will be released, but one thing I do know: that the exclamation applies to me too: ‘I have become your donkey, [O Lord], and in just this way am I with you’” (156). From Augustine’s perspective, “no one has a right to lead a life of contemplation to the neglect of temporal responsibilities, but no one should be so immersed in active service as to relinquish the delight of truth completely. In other words, the good of the earthly city deserves our attention as we patiently anticipate the realization of the heavenly city. In effect, Augustine’s resolution of the tension between action and contemplation assumed the following form: although contemplation is superior to action (*Mary has chosen the better part* [Luke 10.42]), we must accept an apostolate when the church requires our talents; yet even in the midst of active endeavors, we should continue to take delight in contemplation.” *Contemplata tradere*.

d. Thomas Merton and contemplation in action

The writings of Thomas Merton, an American Trappist monk, played a major role in restoring “contemplation” to the forefront of Catholic spirituality in the 20th century. *Seeds of Contemplation*, a book which he updated and reissued a few years later under the title *New Seeds of Contemplation*, contains a chapter entitled “Sharing the Fruits of Contemplation.” In it he describes the Thomistic process of *contemplata tradere*. Merton wrote that “we do not see God in contemplation – we *know* Him by love: for He is pure Love and when we taste the experience of loving God for His own sake alone, we know by experience Who and what He is . . . [And] if we experience God in contemplation, we experience Him not for ourselves alone but also for others . . . [We] want everybody else to share this peace and this joy.” Merton concludes: “The highest vocation in the Kingdom of God is that of sharing one’s contemplation with others and bringing others to the experimental knowledge of God that has been given to those who love Him . . . No one teaches contemplation except God, Who gives it. The best [we] can do is to write something or say something that will serve as an occasion for someone else to realize what God wants of him.” In a similar way Leo Dehon invites us to join him and “to taste and see the goodness of the Lord” (Ps 34.9). But only if we *taste* will we see.

e. Leo Dehon’s application of Augustine and Gregory’s writings: the life of Mary

Now let me offer you one final example of the interplay of contemplation and action in Leo Dehon’s life. In the Spring of 1868 when he was wondering whether he was being called to a life of contemplation and study or to a life of apostolic activity. At the same time that he was seeking

insight from the writings of Augustine and Gregory something similar was taking place in his morning meditation. During the month of May, quite naturally, he took events in the life of Mary as the subject of his meditation.

In one of the first of these meditations he wrote: “Judging herself to be unworthy to give birth to the Messiah, Mary did not seek marriage like the other daughters of Israel, but she made a vow of chastity and completely devoted herself to God . . . Mary lived a simple life, withdrawn from her companions. She praised God by fulfilling his will as indicated by her rule. She divided her day between prayer, work, and study . . . [Therefore] Mary is troubled by the appearance of the angel and his words. This greeting seems to jeopardize her virginity and her humility. Let us frequently renew our declarations of exclusive love for the bridegroom of our soul. . .” (NQT 1/148-50).

As we can see, he begins by considering Mary as a model of prayer and contemplation; she is devoted to God “completely” and “exclusively.” This is why she is “greatly troubled” by the angelic greeting and she expresses her hesitation. It is only after the angel reassures her that this is God’s will for her, does Mary give her consent: “Behold the handmaid of the Lord” (Luke 1.38). The seminarian understands her response to be the full expression of all that was in her heart: “to serve God humbly, to follow all his inspirations and his will. This is the source of all greatness and honor . . . Having become his mother, Mary lives entirely for Jesus . . . Jesus and Mary had only one soul, one mind, and one heart” (NQT 1/151-2). Thus, when she accepts this new expression of God’s will for her to become the mother of the Messiah, she discovers that she is even more intimately united to Him than before.

Then in a meditation on the following day Dehon wrote: “Mary interrupted the contemplation of her Savior to go and be of assistance to Elizabeth, or rather she united the love of her neighbor to her love of God. Like the ark of the covenant, she was clothed in gold on the interior and the exterior. Following her example, let us love others without forsaking God. Let us remain united to God, in a union that is constant, intense, and always consistent . . . In Elizabeth’s home Mary displays a generous and persevering charity. She offers her services as long as they are needed, yet all the while she does not fail to contemplate the Savior who is in her womb” (NQT 1/153-5).

In this brief sequence of meditations we are able to follow the interplay of contemplation and action as they developed in the young seminarian’s life and prayer. In the first meditation Mary goes from contemplation to action, from Annunciation to Visitation; while in the subsequent meditation this movement is reversed as she goes from action to contemplation. These entries in his meditation notes foreshadow the rhythm of his lifelong spiritual journey, which consisted of the interior life of contemplation and the service of apostolic activity. Although their competing attractions and demands were a frequent source of tension in his life, he always realized that he could not attain one goal without the other. For him the interior life was never a retreat from the difficult problems in human and social affairs; rather interior prayer was the engine which drove his conviction that genuine apostolic action could only come about through intimacy with Jesus. The fulfillment of the first commandment to love God above all is spontaneously expressed by carrying out the second commandment to have an active and practical love of one’s neighbor; and, conversely, it is our love of others that gives glory to God.

C. Testimony

Steve Koepke is a director of development at Sacred Heart Southern Missions in Mississippi, USA. He discussed what it meant to be a Dehonian at one of the Mission Education sessions held by the USA Province. Steve is a Dehonian Associate

“Twice in the last year I have been involved in a volunteer project in Tunica, MS. The task involved renovating a home. To call this structure a “shack” was probably being generous. It was four rooms covering barely 400 square feet with holes in the roof and floors and rotting wood throughout. I remember thinking, “no one should have to live like this.” As volunteers we murmured to each other that the project would probably be better served if we simply tore it down and started from scratch. Yet, for the family, they had lived here for decades. Their children were raised here. This was home.

So we reinforced the roof so it would hold a new set of shingles and we put up sheet rock and siding on uneven walls that were never square and slowly a comfortable and safe living space emerged.

But I knew this was only half of the miracle. The staff that led us, the tools we used and most of the materials had been made possible because of gifts from our donors. Kind hearted people throughout the country had made gifts, large and small, to help people they would never meet, to renovate a house they would never see and to help a family they would never talk to.

It is Sacred Heart Southern Missions, inspired by Fr. Dehon, which brings these generous people and these humble recipients together. On the drive home I remember thinking, “This is what it means to be Catholic. This is what it means to be Dehonian. This is the Sacred Heart alive and working in our world today.”

D. Discussion and sharing

In one of his meditations, Dehon wrote: “Contemplation is more necessary for those in the apostolate than it is for contemplatives themselves” (CAM 1/189). And in saying this he was anticipating the advice that Pope Benedict gave to the priests of Rome: “Activism by itself can even be heroic, but in the end external action is fruitless and loses its effectiveness unless it is born from deep inner communion with Christ. The time we spend on this is truly a time of pastoral activity, authentic pastoral activity” (Chrism Mass, 13 April, 2006).

- How do you understand the two quotes, one from Dehon, the other from Pope Benedict?
- Do you have a healthy balance between contemplation and action? How do you feed your day to day activities? How do you create a healthy balance between your work and your prayer?

E. A moment of Prayer

Above all else Christians must be people of deep personal prayer. At the conclusion of this reflection on contemplation and action, invite the participants to say a prayer of rededication.

Prayer of rededication

Lord, as sons and daughters of Leo John Dehon,
We are conscious of our unity with all men and women
Throughout the world and through the ages.
We rededicate ourselves to you
And we commit ourselves to share with all of them
The love we have from you in Jesus.
We regard it as our personal and communal mission
To minister your love
To all who are frustrated and disappointed
In their hunger and search for love, for you.
Help us to conquer
All selfishness and complacency
All intolerance and impatience,
All distinctions and divisiveness.
At last, may all people experience your love for them,
And know that they are free
To respond to your love in joy and gratitude,
With all their heart and mind and strength.
May this same love
Embrace all men and women as brothers and sisters.
Amen.

Blessing: May the Lord bless us, keep us from evil and bring us to everlasting life.

Literature

Meeting XXXIX

ACCOMPANIMENT AND SPIRITUAL DIRECTION

Objectives of the Meeting

- To examine the dynamic of spiritual direction as a guide to our ongoing spiritual development;
- To examine the importance of spiritual direction for the development of a spiritual life;
- To indicate some of the aspects of life that would benefit from the guidance of a spiritual director.

Structure of the Meeting

- a. Why spiritual direction?
- b. The form of spiritual direction.
- c. The topics of spiritual direction.

Development of the Meeting

A. Welcome

A word from the Bible (Acts 10.1-35)

Begin by reading a text (Acts 10.1-35). It is a beautiful text of discernment for Cornelius as well as for Peter. In spiritual direction one searches with the help of someone for direction in one's life. Both Cornelius and Peter made a significant shift in their lives:

“In Caesarea there was a man named Cornelius, a centurion of the Italian Cohort, as it was called. He was a devout man who feared God with all his household; he gave alms generously to the people and prayed constantly to God. One afternoon at about three o'clock he had a vision in which he clearly saw an angel of God coming in and saying to him, ‘Cornelius.’ He stared at him in terror and said, ‘What is it, Lord?’ He answered, ‘Your prayers and your alms have ascended as a memorial before God. Now send men to Joppa for a certain Simon who is called Peter; he is lodging with Simon, a tanner, whose house is by the seaside.’ When the angel who spoke to him had left, he called two of his slaves and a devout soldier from the ranks of those who served him, and after telling them everything, he sent them to Joppa.

About noon the next day, as they were on their journey and approaching the city, Peter went up on the roof to pray. He became hungry and wanted something to eat; and while it was being prepared, he fell into a trance. He saw the heaven opened and something like a large sheet coming down, being lowered to the ground by its four corners. In it were all kinds of four-footed creatures and reptiles and birds of the air. Then he heard a voice saying, ‘Get up, Peter; kill and eat.’ But Peter said, ‘By no means, Lord; for I have never eaten anything that is profane or unclean.’ The voice said to him again, a second time, ‘What God has made clean, you must not call profane.’ This happened three times, and the thing was suddenly taken up to heaven.

Now while Peter was greatly puzzled about what to make of the vision that he had seen, suddenly the men sent by Cornelius appeared. They were asking for Simon's house and were standing by the gate. They called out to ask whether Simon, who was called Peter, was staying there. While Peter was still thinking about the vision, the Spirit said to him, 'Look, three men are searching for you. Now get up, go down, and go with them without hesitation; for I have sent them.' So Peter went down to the men and said, 'I am the one you are looking for; what is the reason for your coming?' They answered, 'Cornelius, a centurion, an upright and God-fearing man, who is well spoken of by the whole Jewish nation, was directed by a holy angel to send for you to come to his house and to hear what you have to say.' So Peter invited them in and gave them lodging.

The next day he got up and went with them, and some of the believers* from Joppa accompanied him. The following day they came to Caesarea. Cornelius was expecting them and had called together his relatives and close friends. On Peter's arrival Cornelius met him, and falling at his feet, worshipped him. But Peter made him get up, saying, 'Stand up; I am only a mortal.' And as he talked with him, he went in and found that many had assembled; and he said to them, 'You yourselves know that it is unlawful for a Jew to associate with or to visit a Gentile; but God has shown me that I should not call anyone profane or unclean. So when I was sent for, I came without objection. Now may I ask why you sent for me?'

Cornelius replied, 'Four days ago at this very hour, at three o'clock, I was praying in my house when suddenly a man in dazzling clothes stood before me. He said, "Cornelius, your prayer has been heard and your alms have been remembered before God. Send therefore to Joppa and ask for Simon, who is called Peter; he is staying in the home of Simon, a tanner, by the sea." Therefore I sent for you immediately, and you have been kind enough to come. So now all of us are here in the presence of God to listen to all that the Lord has commanded you to say.'

Then Peter began to speak to them: 'I truly understand that God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him.'

A word from Fr. Dehon

"I begin with spiritual readings. The venerable Bellarmine (*The Mind's Ascent to God, 1614*) showed me how St. Paul drew in a few words a whole program of spiritual direction. "Never," he said, "can one arrive at the art of living happily and well, if one does not go to the school of Jesus Christ who is the sole master (Matt 13.8), if, by his words and examples, one does not allow oneself to be formed by this justice, which would bring him on the path of the scribes, Pharisees and philosophers, but rather to the justice whose goal is charity, the fruit of a pure heart, of a person of good conscience and sincere faith (1Tim 1.5) (...) I can say that for me this was a definitive light. It became the overriding rule of this year and of my whole life. The direction of my interior life, hobbled, I must say, by countless failures, has always been the love of our Lord, maintained by the faith and the purity of heart and conscience." (NHV 4/208)

B. Reflection on the theme: *Why spiritual direction? What is it?*

1. Search for growth

Have you also asked yourself often: "Who am I? What could I be? Who are you, God, for me? How can I make more of my life? What is the meaning of life? Is there any sense or order to my life? "

Many people today ask themselves such questions. With these questions they express their desire or their search for growth – personal growth. At every stage of human development there is also a corresponding spiritual growth. These stages carry specific meanings.

- These moments are about one's own reality and about the reality of God in all the experiences of life. Nothing is excluded. Nothing is outside or left out. It is about the whole person.
- God, who is the giver of all life, wishes us to have life to the full, despite all the difficulties and problems, despite all our failures.
- Our life makes sense in God. He gives it meaning. Our knowledge of our place in this world gives us strength and allows us to live life more fully.
- We are constantly being invited to a new becoming. We may not remain the way we are. God wishes us to become more alive and more able to love. We cannot go this way alone.

2. Spiritual direction – an opportunity and a way!

Spiritual direction has a goal to help individuals to discover the spiritual dimension in one's personal life and through it to arrive at a wholesome growth of one's personality. In it the whole reality of the person is at stake, the bodily as well the soul-dimension and the spiritual, in its relationship to itself and to others. Spiritual direction helps individuals to stay within a conversation with God about oneself and one's life. It seeks to help someone to arrive at a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.

Spiritual direction searches for an answer to the question about the place and the tasks to which God has called individuals.

- Spiritual direction picks up what the individual out of him/herself has brought out into the open in the conversation.
- Spiritual direction helps one to arrive at self-knowledge, self-acceptance and to the acknowledgment of God in one's life. In this way one achieves a certain self-discernment and helps in decision (*discernimiento*).
- Spiritual direction opens up positive possibilities for getting along with himself. It does not guarantee that there will not be crises on the way.
- Spiritual direction happens through the active offering of „spiritual exercises“: encouragements to prayer and meditation, the use of Sacred Scripture, with images, with every-day experiences.

The accumulated experiences will be the basis for the accompanying conversation, in which the meaning of what has been experienced for the next steps of the spiritual path and for further growth will be explored and found.

3. Spiritual direction – What should I be prepared to do?

- On being ready personally to want to enter upon a spiritual path and in that context to speak of one's religious / spiritual experiences.
- On being ready every day to spend a certain amount of time for consistent „spiritual exercises.“
- On being ready to question and be questioned about one's daily experiences for their spiritual meaning.
- On being ready on regular intervals of about three or four weeks to speak with your spiritual director / directress.

4. What may I expect from a spiritual director?

- The spiritual director is a human who him or herself has a spiritual path and who allows his or her life to be shaped by this. Faith in the workings of God is his spiritual foundation.
- He or she has personal experiences in being directed.
- The spiritual director recognizes the basic interconnection between a person's life and faith history. He or she is sensitive to the underlying human processes and is able to distinguish them appropriately. He or she is appropriately suited for this service.
- The spiritual director has a deep respect for the individuality and personal calling of the other. Each human being has his or her own calling from God and is personally responsible for his or her life. For this reason, the director avoids any form of manipulation. Absolute discretion goes without saying.

5. What is the background of spiritual direction?

Spiritual direction has a long tradition. At one time it was called "the direction of souls." However, that is a false concept. Only God, only God's Spirit guides the soul, the spiritual life of people. Especially in religious communities, spiritual direction took place, even though often with a false understanding. Spiritual direction is a form of conversational pastoral practice.

Faith conversation / catechesis is a conversation that ought to take place in a group.

- (1) Confessional conversation – takes place in the context of the sacrament of confession.
- (2) Pastoral conversation – a conversation which usually takes place in a crisis situation
- (3) Spiritual direction (as already said, often called „the direction of souls.“)

6. Sources of „Spiritual direction“

a. *The discipleship of Jesus*

The disciples went to school with Jesus. „Master, where do you live? Come and see!“ The daily company, the constant observation, the teaching of the disciples, the loneliness and the quiet of the night, etc.

b. *The experiences of the "Desert Fathers."*

People went searching for the Desert Fathers (Egyptians, Syrians, Cappadocians...),

- Who lived in a kind of seclusion – in isolation, in quiet
- Who in their life accumulated a rich knowledge of life
- Who gained a certain spiritual authority - not through studies
- Who were lay people, no clerics, or ordained people

Characteristics of the Desert Fathers:

- Secluding themselves - away from the crowds
- Being able to be with themselves, no longer fleeing
- accepting a deep stillness and emptiness
- learning to renounce things, asceticism
- cultivating watchfulness
- being attentive to the many, inner impulses
- being silent, listening – no longer to arrange, assess, judge

- becoming meek, merciful in his dealing with people
- giving short and precise answers, no long speeches, against rhetoric
- daily keeping death before his eyes, straightforward

Keeping track of the many inner feelings and impulses:

- the empire of desires: a. covetousness b. gluttony c. lust
- the emotional sphere: a. paralyzing sadness b. anger / resentment c. listlessness
- the spiritual sphere: a. Search for honor b. envy/comparing oneself with others c. pride / hubris

c. The „Process of the Ignatian Exercises“

In the classical Ignatian Exercises (individual exercises, silence throughout, several periods of prayer) with its five levels (principle and foundation; week 1: conversion; week 2: deeper friendship with Jesus Christ; week 3: meditation of the death on the cross; week 4: living from hope – resurrection) requires a spiritual director in order to accompany the „practitioners“ (once a day for about half an hour), to avoid getting stuck in the inner life, not to fall into depression, to avoid being blocked by inner dryness and emptiness, so that he or she can grow and flourish.)

i. Grow and ripen

What is sought is a “more”, a “surplus”: this is Ignatius’s “magis”. A more of...

- Life / liveliness
- Freedom – the freedom and glory of the children of God
- Peace – a peace, which this world cannot give
- Love – Who does not love is already dead
- Joy
- Truth – The truth will make you free
- Light - Through baptism your life will be enlightened

Grow and ripen

- Becoming alive and free – the gift of joyful way of life
- Becoming capable of relationships and love – the gift of a loving way of life
- Becoming creative and responsible – the gift of a creative way of life
- Becoming calm and religious – the gift of a trustful way of life

ii. It is presupposed that one holds:

- A daily period of personal prayer (ca. 20 Minutes)
- A review of the day – the prayer of loving attentiveness
- A daily reading from the Bible
- Morning prayer
- Spiritual reading – is meaningful
- A diary – is meaningful

iii. Themes

All possible themes of life can become a topic of conversation. Here are some topics which may come up in such a conversation with a spiritual director.

Possible themes, areas that can come into the conversation

- My life story (Biography) – looking attentively with God’s eyes
- My life story: character /background- persons – breaks – parents and home
- My way of “faith” – different pathways of faith
- Experiences of God – being grasped by God: places, moments
- My prayer times – do I have an order in my life?
- The type and ways of my prayer
- Prayer – to discuss my life with God
- Attentive to the different impulses of the soul – within
- Listening – responding - obedient
- Where am I being pulled – my desires
- Do I notice the call of Jesus – his invitation, my following?
- Can I live with myself – or am I inclined to flee?
- Church – how is my attitude to the Church?
- My gifts, capacities, charisms – do I attend to them?
- Am I relational?
- How do I work with intimacy and distance?
- Do I notice within myself a ripening and growth?
- Experiences of inner dryness and emptiness
- How is my way of speaking – conversation - dialogue?
- Do I know my inner disordered traits: envy – gluttony – anger etc.?
- Attentiveness, “piety of soul” - for life, people, nature?
- What does the celebration of Eucharist mean for me?
- My participation in the celebration of the Eucharist
- Spiritual reading (spiritual literature): reading – meditating – reflecting - praying
- My review of the day – the “prayer of loving attentiveness”
- How do I maintain my diary? What do I retain, note down?
- My beginning of the day: how do I get up in thanksgiving?
- Living in the presence of God (YHWH: I am who I am)
- Am I on track in the search of the “more” (*magis*): peace, joy, truth, life?
- My self-worth – how am I doing?
- My way of dealing with sicknesses, insults, offences?
- Am I “addicted” to: recognition, praise, possessions, alcohol?
- I and my life: am I a victim, flower on the wall, an example, etc.?
- Reading of the Bible: how do I read the Sacred Scriptures? (different ways)
- Reflection on the scriptures: the relation to Jesus Christ. What do I gain?
- Living reconciled – How many friends do I have? How do I relate to them?
- How do I treat my body?
- What are my secret desires?
- How do I integrate my sexuality, intimacy, erotic desires?
- My charisms, spiritual gifts, my capacities / talents - do I appreciate them?
- Living the awareness of being a nomad, a pilgrim – my homelessness
- Possessions: do I cling to my possessions? Can I let go?
- Self-esteem: am I excessively in search of honors; must I be the center of attention?

- Do I allow myself to be touched by the need of other people?
- What fears do I live with?
- How do I make decisions? (How do I discern?)
- Are there illnesses or addictions in my life? How do I deal with them?
- Relation with people – according to the “mind” or attitude of Jesus Christ?
- My view of the Church – my contribution
- Growing – flourishing – developing
- My faith: dark spots – doubts – search?
- The experiences of Desert Fathers today: what is your perspective?
- What sort of image do I have of a priest?
- What sort of a person am I? (e.g. my enneagram)
- Do I have any hidden or secret corners in my life?
- Confession – a place for reconciliation and forgiveness: what is my practice?
- My life style: simple – credible – inviting?
- What does my faith look like: trust – doubt – mystical – liturgical, etc.?
- Mission: Do I know myself as sent by God? Do I send myself?
- Giving witness – to give testimony of my faith – less trying to explain, prove?
- Do I give an account of my hope that is in me?
- Greatest love, who give up oneself – Am I ready to lose out of love for others?
- Am I ready to take the last place?
- Believing attitude and practice: a religion for show or more hidden?

7. Form

- Length: about three quarters of an hour
- In a closed room which is comfortable and pleasant
- With lit candles and a cross or an icon
- Silent - restful - composed
- Beginning and end: with a free prayer
- confidentiality

8. Expectation – with what sort of mood?

- Some know nothing of a „spiritual direction“. They come because they have heard of spiritual direction or because someone they know has suggested it.
- Others ask immediately: What do you have to offer? (the offerings of all sorts of psychotherapeutic schools or esotericism)
- Others demand of the director different spiritual impulses: that s/he can help with certain sufferings, the understanding of Eucharist, spiritual practices, great spiritual examples, etc.
- The classical form: the director is almost exclusively a „listener.“ See for example Franz Jalics SJ. In conversation, when the directed person expresses himself and formulates, he is already giving an orientation to him or herself and is already indicating ways to him or herself.
- Often it is some type of dialogue: the director and the person seeking direction enter into a spiritual conversation.

C. Testimony

The testimonies come from employees of the ministry of the United States Province toward the Native Americans (mostly Lakota) in the state of South Dakota and African Americans in the state of Mississippi. Cumulatively they help to create awareness of the diversity of witnesses to the legacy of Fr. Dehon.

Sherry Langle – Counselor – SJIS (St. Joseph’s Indian School)

Hi, my name is Sherry Langle and I am one of the 1st-5th Grade Girls Family Service Counselors. I am a Dehonian because I believe in the Mission of St. Joseph’s Indian School. Fr. Dehon brought a vision to the United States to provide a sense of spirit and hope to those who were living in impoverished conditions. Through this vision and with the help of the Congregation of the Priests of the Sacred Heart, St. Joseph’s Indian School was founded to help those children and families living in these impoverished conditions. For the love Fr. Dehon had for working and helping others, I as a Family Service Counselor can continue his work by providing the support, guidance and care for the students of St. Joseph’s Indian School through the continued collaboration of working with the whole family. In doing this, I am helping the students and families through education of life skills to strengthen their mind, body, hearts and spirits.

Dixie Thompson – Museum Director – SJIS

I am Dixie Thompson and I’m the Director of the Akta Lakota Museum at St. Joseph’s Indian School. I am a Dehonian because the work we do at the Akta Lakota Museum reflects many of Fr. Dehon’s teachings and values. By collecting, preserving and caring for materials that document the life of the Lakota people we provide our students and others an opportunity to learn about the Lakota based on respect, education and sensitivity to the culture. As a Dehonian I find comfort and support in the work I do by the living the vision that Fr. Leo John Dehon set before us.

Maria Eveland – Development Office – SJIS

I am Maria Eveland and I work at St. Joseph’s Indian School in the Nagel Building. I am Dehonian because I believe in and respect Fr. Dehon’s mission to help poor Native American children. I believe in helping to educate them in mind, body and spirit and to help them become successful in life, in school and in the future. I am very happy to have the opportunity to be part of his mission and help my fellow Native Americans to become strong, healthy and positive people who are builders of respect and unity between Lakota and other American Traditions.

Tom Thomas – Facilities Manager – SJIS

I am Tom Thomas and I am the Facilities Maintenance Supervisor. I am a Dehonian because of the work I do in the maintenance department. Our department relates to the St. Joe’s core value of excellence. We do this through continuing education. We are always on the lookout for new and better ways to improve everything we do. These improvements lead to better buildings, safer vehicles and nicer-looking grounds for everyone. Our goal is to provide living conditions for students, work facilities for staff, and public spaces for visitors that reflect the warm and welcoming spirit of the SCJs.

Kathleen Donohue – Educational Director – SJIS

Attending the Educare Conference in 2012 gave me a more global perspective of Fr. Dehon’s message as educator. The conference was tasked with creating a portrait of a Dehonian educator. An educator modeled in the charism of Fr. Dehon seeks a holistic approach to learning including mind, body and spirit. He/she encourages creativity and calls the heart to open itself to others especially to those in need. Here at St. Joseph’s Indian School, everyone one on our campus is called to walk in Fr. Dehon’s shoes reaching out to our students in mind, body and heart. As an educator it is a true joy to see faith in action within our students’ lives as we plant the seeds and cultivate the values of the heart.

Robyn Knecht – High School Residential Coordinator — SJIS

I am Robyn Knecht and I am the High School Residential Coordinator at St. Joseph’s Indian School. I am most like Fr. Dehon in the ways of being a social service minister. My education and experience center on counseling young people throughout the struggles in their lives. My current role opens the door to working not only with young people and families, but also with the staff who have a profound impact on the students – their houseparents. Fr. Dehon once wrote, “I have been led by Divine Providence to plow many furrows, but two in particular will leave an indelible mark: Christian social action and the life of love and reparation to the Sacred Heart of Jesus.” These words speak to the calling that I have to embody Christian social action by serving those in need with guidance that promotes positive change.

Sherry Hansen – Food Services Assistant Manager

My name is Sherry Hansen and I work in the Food Services Department. I am Dehonian because my job gives me the opportunity to teach our students how good nutritious food will help them learn and make their bodies healthier, which in turn helps them deal with whatever life brings. Being welcoming and interested in what they have to say is also an important part of my day. I am blessed to have spent 25 years here. St Joe’s is my extended family – my tiyospaye – where I feel appreciated and cared for. I want to pass this feeling on to the students.

Brian George – Houseparent – SJIS

My name is Brian George and I’m a houseparent in the sixth through eighth grade community at St. Joseph’s Indian School. I embrace the values of compassion, encouragement and inspiration that our founder, Fr. Leo Dehon, SCJ represented in his lifelong commitment to Christ. My Native American heritage serves as a catalyst that enables me to serve our Native children as a positive role model. The values and spirit of Fr. Dehon are mirrored at St. Joseph’s Indian School and reflected in my work and in my spirit through the achievements of our students. When our children’s dreams come true, my life is fulfilled. I follow the dream. I am Dehonian.

D. Discussion and sharing

Fr. Dehon was quite clear what he expected from a spiritual director. Here is part of his advice: “Those to whom the direction of souls is confided must be proven religious. They must be men whose heart is warmed by the love of the Heart of Jesus, and not men of ice, rejecting the live of the heart with Jesus. They must also be prudent and firm men who will have the necessary energy to

keep the soul on a wise way which is that of the observance of the rule and the conscientious fulfillment of their duties. The life of love which is proposed has no other goal than to let souls move out of their everyday condition. It seeks to have people act for the love of the Heart of Jesus and to transform as much as possible the least actions and to have them present actions affectionately to this divine Heart. A soul full of the fervor of love is pushed by grace into the way of love... Our Lord draws by his grace. It does not take miracles to direct. It is necessary, therefore, to give great importance to spiritual direction.”

- What has been your experience of spiritual direction?
- How might spiritual direction help you on your spiritual journey?

E. A moment of prayer.

In conclusion, we pray the prayer “Union with the Heart of Christ” of St. Gertrude of Helfta (1256-ca.1301)

Hail, Sacred Heart of Jesus,
Living and strengthening source of eternal life,
Infinite treasury of divinity,
And burning furnace of divine love!
You are my refuge and sanctuary.
My loving Savior,
Consume my heart in that burning love
With which your own heart is inflamed.
Pour out upon me those graces
Which flow from your love.
Let my heart be so united with yours
That our wills may be one,
And my will may in all things be conformed
With your will.
May your will be the guide and rule
Of my desires and my actions.
Amen

V/ Blessed be God our Father,

R/ Blessed forever.

V/ Blessed be the Son, the Word made flesh.

R/ Blessed forever.

V/ Blessed be the Holy Spirit, Gift of God and Paraclete.

R/ Blessed forever.

Final blessing

May the Lord bless us, keep us from all evil and bring us to eternal life.

- W.A. Berry – W.J. Connolly, *The practise of spiritual direction*
- Klemens Schaupp, *Gott im Leben entdecken*, Echter-Verlag 1994
- Peter Köster, *Mehrere Beiträge in der Reihe: Dokumentation des Instituts der Orden, mehrere Referate in dieser Reihe*
- Die Reihe: „*Korrespondenz zur Spiritualität der Exerzitien*“ (GCL Publikation)
- DBK (Dt. Bischofskonferenz), *Da kam Jesus hinzu, Handreichung für geistliche Begleitung*, Nr. 158, 2001

Meeting XL

DEHONIAN FAMILY

Objectives of the Meeting

- To reflect on the sharing of the Dehonian charism among the People of God;
- To know the “Charter of Communion” of the Dehonian Family.
- To enter into the perspectives of the “Family”

Structure of the Meeting

The organization of the Dehonian Family comes from our time. Its basis must be sought in the Church’s conciliar theology of communion and the complementarity of vocations of the one People of God, the participation of all the faithful in the mission of the Church, and the universal vocation to holiness of everyone in accordance with their state of life.

Historical Note: At the XVIII General Chapter (1985), Fr. Girardi suggested the idea of "a Dehonian community as a communion of different vocations around the charismatic project of Fr. Dehon".

In 1990, there was the International Encounter of the *Dehonian Laity*, in which, alongside the lay people, also Dehonians and some members of the Compagnia Missionaria participated. Each of the three components accepted the idea of a "Dehonian community as a communion of different vocations." In the three circular letters, sent respectively to the Dehonian Major Superiors, the Dehonian confreres and to the Dehonian Laity (04.01.1991), Fr. Antonio Panteghini informed each of them about the recent meeting, using the title "Dehonian Family".

Development of the Meeting

A. Welcome

You can introduce the participants to the theme with two texts and have them talk about their own ecclesial experience:

*1. From the post-synodal apostolic exhortation **Christifideles laici**:*

"In the Church as communion, the states of life are so interconnected that they are ordained to one another. Certainly common, indeed unique is their deep meaning: they are modes of living the same Christian dignity, the same universal vocation to holiness in the perfection of love. They are modes that are both different and complementary, in such a way that each of them has its own original and unmistakable physiognomy, and at the same time is related to others and to their service ... All states of life, both in their entirety and each one individually in relation to others, are at the service of the growth of the Church. They are different ways of uniting deeply in the "mystery of communion" of the Church and they dynamically help to achieve its mission " (Cf. 55).

*2. From the letter of Pope Francis (21.11.2014) for the year of **Consecrated Life**:*

In fact, around every religious family, as well as the Societies of Apostolic Life and the secular institutes, there is a larger family, the charismatic family, which includes pious institutes operating

out of the same charism. They include especially lay Christians who feel called as lay people to participate in the same charismatic reality.

A text from the Bible (John 17. 6,11-12,15-23)

⁶ 'I have made your name known to those whom you gave me from the world. They were yours, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word. ¹¹ And now I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one, as we are one. ¹² 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. ¹⁵ I am not asking you to take them out of the world, but I ask you to protect them from the evil one. ¹⁶ They do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world. ¹⁷ Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth. ¹⁸ As you have sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. ¹⁹ And for their sakes I sanctify myself, so that they also may be sanctified in truth.

²⁰ 'I ask not only on behalf of these, but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word, ²¹ 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. ²² The glory that you have given me I have given them, so that they may be one, as we are one, ²³ 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.

A word from Fr. Dehon

"As a general apostolate, I have tried two great initiatives: the first one was to lead priests and faithful to the Heart of Jesus to offer him a daily tribute of worship and love ... I have continued this apostolate with our Reparatory Association, with the periodical which for fifteen years worked for the Kingdom of the Sacred Heart, with my brochures on: "Spiritual Exercises with the Sacred Heart", "Life of Love and Reparation to the Sacred Heart", "The Crowns of the Sacred Heart," "The Priestly Heart of Jesus." Also the writings of Fr. Andre helped. My different periodicals have gone in the same direction, and our associations have developed it. It is an apostolate which must be continued, extended and intensified.

I also wanted to contribute to the promotion among the population of the reign of justice and Christian charity. I have spent a good part of my life doing this, first in Saint-Quentin, then in my social publications, my conferences in Rome and elsewhere, in my participation in numerous congresses. Leo XIII delighted to consider me a faithful interpreter of his social encyclicals. Also this work must be continued" (Souvenirs, XI = LCC 8090139/46-48).

B. Reflection on the theme

1. Sharing the charism

"Always in the history of the Church there is a certain fruitful osmosis among the various experiences of Christian life. In the different centuries and in the different cultural expressions, priesthood, monasticism, martyrdom, virginal life, matrimonial life, have had mutually interwoven values and languages, spirituality and experience." (See Bruno Secondin). This phenomenon also takes on its own terminology. For persons, they have become known as: oblates, tertiaries, families, associates, aggregates, cooperators, collaborators, family members, adherents, confreres. For

groups, they became called: unions, third orders, associations, aggregations, fraternities, families, etc., depending on the type of relationship, the degree of participation and reasons for joining them.

- a. A characteristic of these situations in the past was that the charism was considered as a gift and "almost as a property" of that institution. For this reason, the real members were the religious.

The others (the laity, Institutes of women, priests)

- participated in the spiritual goods of the religious family,
- collaborated or supported the apostolate or the works of the religious,
- became part of the religious community for spiritual, educational and apostolic reasons; however, they were subject to the authority of the institute.

The religious institute was central. It exercised some paternity, priority, or superiority. Lay people were always subordinate.

But, as the Spirit creates freely, at some point, there begin to arise groups which share the same gift without first going through the Congregation. These are the secular institutes and lay groups which come directly from the charism.

- b. Beginning with the Second Vatican Council there emerges a new reality with a new perspective. This happened because of a new theological, ecclesial and spiritual insight. As a consequence, the arrangement of the relationship between the components changed, as well as the figures which name the relationship and the language expressing it. The whole conception of this relationship has changed.

The most visible aspects of this novelty can be summarized as follows:

- all experiences (vocations - expressions) of Christian life are important: they enjoy the same baptismal dignity; they have the same call to holiness, and participate in the same mission of the Church;
- the relationship among them is not one of subordination, but of communion and complementarity;
- a charism is not the property of an individual or group, a movement or institution, but is a gift of the Spirit to the whole Church;
- the sharing of the charism takes place, therefore, as a divine personal vocation and not by delegation or concession of an institution;
- the agent of the development of a charism is the Spirit, who distributes it wherever and to whomever it wants, so it should not be claimed or monopolized by anyone;
- the central point of any participation is the sharing of the same Project of Evangelical Life, which finds its original and communal form in its approach to the mystery of Christ and one's conformity in him;
- the purpose of their interaction, within the Church and in history, is to build the Kingdom of God.

2. From the religious Dehonians and lay Dehonians to the Dehonian Family

- a. Father Dehon felt called to communicate the gift he had received and founded the Congregation. But when he was still the only religious SCJ in 1878, he "invented" the "Reparatory Association". This first lay expression of the charism he connected to the SCJ Institute. These

people, with different titles ("associates" and "aggregates", and subsequently also "oblates": the ART), participated in their own way in the project of the evangelical life of the Congregation, respecting their specific vocation and mission of each.

Especially since 1923, the SCJ Congregation exercised sole authority over ART. The Superior General put in place a Secretary General and appointed various national directors. The SCJ General Superior was also Superior General of ART and, of course, of the Oblates. After all, their form of participation in the project of Evangelical Life of Fr. Dehon took place through the Institute.

- b. In South Africa, in 1929, a great German missionary, Msgr. Franz Wolfgang Demont scj, founded the Missionary Sisters of the Sacred Heart giving them our own spirituality.
 - In Congo, where he was bishop, Msgr. Camillo Verfaillie scj, in 1936 started the Congregation of the Holy Family ("Jamaa Takatifu"). Their spirituality was worked out primarily by Mgr. Joseph Albert Wittebols scj, in two books: "*La donation totale*" and "*Ecce Ancilla Domini*". A wonderful result of this Institute was the Blessed Anuarite Nengapeta, virgin and martyr.
 - In Brazil, the *Fraternidade Mariana do Coração de Jesus*, was founded in 1974 by p. Aloisio Böing scj, at first as a Secular Institute, then transformed into a Religious Congregation.
 - In Spain, in 1950, Fr. Miguel López Moya scj, founded the *Instituto Reparador*, which brings together consecrated women living in the world.
 - In Bologna, in 1957, Fr. Albino Elegante scj, founded the *Compagnia Missionaria del Sacro Cuore di Gesù*, a secular Institute, now existing in Italy, Portugal, Mozambique, Brazil, Chile, Argentina, Guinea Bissau and Indonesia.
 - In Portugal, in 1992, Fr. Giulio Gritti scj, began the secular Institute of the *Missionárias do Amor Misericordioso do Coração de Jesus*.

All these religious and secular institutes, even though they were founded by a Dehonian religious, and sharing with the SCJs many aspects of the charism, are fully autonomous. They are not dependent on the SCJs. They refer directly to the Evangelical project of Fr. Dehon. They do not depend on the Congregation of the Priests of the Sacred Heart.

When the organization of the Reparatory Association ceased to exist, there appeared unexpectedly at the same time and in many parts of the world, groups of lay people, most of them well-established in their vocation and lay mission, who drew their inspiration and commitment from Fr. Dehon. The spirituality of the SCJ communities was contagious. People found in them a model, common values and a specific message. But they did not refer themselves to the authority of the Congregation: they found a direct relationship with Fr. Dehon. His project inspired and strengthened their baptismal commitment and their specific following of Christ and their life's vocation in the world. Fr. Dehon became their fundamental model and historical point of reference. In this way, he became their "spiritual father".

There are also groups of lay people, but also individuals, young people, older people, married or not, whom we call LAY DEHONIANS.

Among these are former seminarians or ex-religious, who kept their historical or affective ties with the SCJs. The majority are people who have discovered the call of the Spirit to share a certain

ecclesial legacy and to pursue their Christian life in this manner. Many of them discovered in themselves the gift of the Spirit, and then became interested in the Congregation and the other members of the "Dehonian Family".

There is great diversity among the groups who come to Dehon's project through the Congregation (e.g. ART, Oblates, etc ...). Many share the essentials of Dehon's gift directly in relationship with the evangelical project of Fr. Dehon.

In the Family there are and you will discover members, who share the experience of being born from a common source. It is therefore not a simple choice of taste or convenience. They share a common content and a common source. This gives rise to a deep sense of belonging that, to the extent that it grows, can become an essential characteristic of one's own being and identity.

They lead to relationships of fraternity, at the center of which is the project of Fr. Dehon. The more authentic and stronger the bonds, the more will grow, among the various parts, communion and collaboration, the sharing of personal and group gifts, without affecting the vocational diversity and legitimate autonomy.

The components of the Family are brothers and sisters because they recognize the same baptism dignity, communion and the uniqueness of each vocation. These are not relations of subordination but of equality, fraternity and reciprocity.

3. The Dehonian Family

The Dehonian Family is the communion of people baptized in Christ – a communion of vocations: religious scj, consecrated in Institutes, lay people (as part of a group or single, married and not) who share in the faith experience of Fr. Dehon. There is a bond between them, something in common, a legacy, a common heritage. The bond is the same CHARISM and DEHONIAN SPIRITUALITY. Various experiences of Christian life, different vocations, different paths come from the same inspiration of faith. From it all participate and live.

The Dehonian family consists therefore of different ecclesial components (SCJ religious priests, consecration institutes, lay people, or not in the group) who share the same inspirational nucleus, the same plan of life according to the Gospel, the same mission. In the plurality and diversity of personal vocations, living conditions, areas and modes of service each component and person finds their unique way.

The ideal model of life, shared with the religious and the members of the other components, is the Heart of Jesus. The mystery of the Heart of Jesus, in light of the Incarnation (life in Nazareth and the public ministry) and in light of Easter (the pierced and glorious heart of Christ on the Cross, the source of the Spirit and the new life for the world), is a form of intimate and institutional communion with the mystery of Christ. (*See Charter of Communion of the Dehonian Family*, December 2001)

- Members of the Dehonian Family are the different ecclesial components, or single individuals, who have received the call to live and share the project of Dehon's evangelical life;
- Being part of the Dehonian Family is a vocation. Not all lay people, who are connected to Dehonian religious, are called to live this vocation. Only those to whom the Holy Spirit makes this gift. In the Church, there are a plurality of spiritualities. Everyone must be faithful to the movement of the Spirit within them. The totality of spiritualities make up the Church's richness and together manifest the fullness of the mystery of Christ;

- The 'Charter of Communion' number 19 gives the criteria for belonging to the Dehonian Family:
 - o perceiving and living the mystery of the Incarnation in the pierced and open heart of Christ...
 - o recognizing the spiritual paternity of Fr. Dehon ...
 - o Participating in his charism, sharing his spirituality and mission, according to his state of life.

And in number 20 the text says: *'By belonging to the Dehonian Family are those who - individually or as a group - ask and commit themselves to "living in communion" the charism of Fr. Dehon; they must undergo a prior discernment, carried out by the "competent bodies" of the Dehonian Family (cf. 23).*

- The vocation to the Dehonian Family has an irradiation, a dimension that goes beyond the person and their history: we are Church, to evangelize, to make known the mystery and love of Christ in the world. The common mission of the Family is the establishment of the Kingdom of the Heart of Jesus in souls and societies. With Fr. Dehon, we can say, *"This is a work of God" - "ours is a beautiful vocation"*. We can only live it with joy and gratitude.

NB. The existence of groups of people, calling themselves secular institutes or congregations, is not excluded. It is a legitimate form of belonging and sharing the same charism and spirituality. It has been the predominant form in the past, especially in the Second or Third Orders, or in the consecration of Oblates and Cooperators. In fact, the *Compagnia Missionaria* has its own extension in the *"Familiars"*; the Fraternity of Maria in Brazil has its own *"Aderentes"*. This confirms that there may be groups of lay people linked to the Institutes, with different levels of autonomy. They come to the Project of the Evangelical Life of Fr. Dehon by way of the Institute to which they refer. The road may seem complicated, needing different bridges to be traversed. However, it gives witness to the creativity of the Spirit, who is not held to our plans. It is a signal of the importance of the Church's mediation so that each may attain the free and divine gift of salvation.

4. The service of the SCJs in the Dehonian Family

For the *Dehonian Family*, the *Charter of Communion* gives a clear description of the relation of the SCJs to the other components, even though there remain grey areas which need further reflection.

- a. SCJs must note that "at the center of the Dehonian Family there is not the SCJ Institute, but the Dehonian Project of Evangelical Life", that is, the charism (spirituality and mission) of Fr. Dehon (*Charter of Communion*, No. 8). In other words, the participation of others in the charism of Fr. Dehon "takes place by the Spirit and not by the power of the Institute" (*Charter of Communion*, No. 4).
- b. As Father Dehon is the true spiritual father of this Family, we must know how to welcome others "as brothers and sisters, nourishing fraternal and equal relationships" (*Charter of Communion*, nn.5-6); "We welcome one another reciprocally, recognizing them as brothers and sisters" (*Charter of Communion*, No. 15).
- c. "For the SCJs the Dehonian Family is a grace that strengthens their own identity and sense of belonging to the Institute, helps to discover new perspectives and a deeper reading of the charism. It is a challenge that invites them to accept gladly the new brothers and sisters whom the Lord gives" (*Charter of Communion*, No. 8).

- d. With regard to the Dehonian mission of "establishing the Kingdom of the Heart of Jesus in souls and society," we must "be open to any pastoral collaboration with other members of the Dehonian Family" (*Charter of Communion*, No. 12) But we must not use one another in order to support our own apostolic work and activities.
- e. Since every component of the Dehonian Family is called to re-read and incarnate the charism, according to the uniqueness of each vocation and state of life, "the SCJs serve to ensure the dynamic fidelity in the interpretation of the charism of Father Dehon, as its first historical realization."(*Charter of Communion*, No. 17).
 - They may expect from the SCJ 'a solid theological and theological support' for an "adequate formation" into the Dehonian spirituality and mission and into a life-long spiritual path (*Charter of Communion*, No. 18).
 - "It is necessary to help them in the discernment of belonging (to the Dehonian Family), at its different levels. The Priests of the Sacred Heart, as Father Dehon willed it, are the first members of this Family. In the approval of their Constitutions, this is the declaration of the Church" (*Charter of Communion*, n. 20).
 - In keeping with their diversity and their organizational autonomy, SCJs must help to foster communion among the different components with formative and celebratory tools and meetings, building collaboration at various levels, and promoting representative and organizational bodies (*Charter of Communion*, n. 21-23).

C. Testimony

It is good to look for testimonies either in the single entities or at the level of the continents. Here we present an account of lay people sharing the Dehonian charism in the area of Castiglione delle Stiviere (MN), Italy.

Around the Dehonian charism: a rainbow of colors

We are lay people, of different ages and vocations, who live in the area of Castiglione delle Stiviere and surroundings.

By meeting the dehonian Community of Ghisiola, who welcomed us, shared their spiritual path, and helped us to discern our vocations at different times and ways, we became acquainted with the charism of Father Dehon and we were attracted to him.

None of the fathers talked openly about the teachings and charism of Father Dehon, but we saw the beauty and originality of the charism through their spirituality, the reading of Scripture, their welcome, their proclamation of God-Trinity of Love, their life style, their way of celebrating and praying, their homilies. Gradually we became involved.

We breathed in the "new air" and everyone tried to "know" this treasure, asking, urging, promoting, confirming

Some formation courses during a two-year period at the Ghisiola Community or at the communities in Bologna and Milan or just by reading and deepening a number of Biblical-theological-spiritual themes in a Dehonian key have given us the different shades of the charism and made us feel that this was how we would live our lives as lay people in our area.

Some live it as a response to a vocation. Others see it as a light as they make their daily choices; Others again see it as a typical way of proclaiming the Gospel. Others have chosen it as a lifestyle. Others take it as a way of living their social and political life. Everyone, starting with the charism, lives a facet, which becomes color, light and harmony if it blends with other colors and lights. Five years ago, some of us felt the need to walk together with other lay people who share the Dehonian spirituality in our area. We dreamed that we could live the Dehonian way with this community. However, the constant change of people, different sensitivities, a different vision of the Dehonian presence at Ghisiola made this impossible.

Nevertheless, what grew was a new lay experience of reading the biblical-spiritual content that the Fathers Duci and Perroux had given us. It deepened our knowledge and our sharing with lay people. Some of our family situations have become opportunities for getting together, "Dehonian" dialogue, study, prayer, support, and wealth.

Our common journey has allowed us to create a lay voice. It is still weak, but it is passionate and eager to share with others what we have received.

And this year we have thought of extending a formation course to other lay people. So, beside monthly meetings in our homes, some of us, with the support of one of the Dehonians, have begun a faith journey with some lay people in the area. For five Sundays, we have begun to reflect, right next to the Community of Ghisiola, on the theme of "meeting with each other". It is an experience that gives us richness, creates hospitality and above all it allows us to pass on what we have freely received.

Our homes and the Ghisiola community are places where we search, dialogue, deepen our lives, pray and celebrate, in communion with the local Church of the area. Our houses and the Ghisiola community are like small hermitages where we breathe our oxygen, where we can come and live our daily lives, where everyone is called, with his loved ones, his work, his parish, his compatriots. We feel the weariness of our walk as lay people, but also its beauty. We believe in the Dehonian charism and we feel its grace. We feel responsible together with the religious for what the Lord has given us and sent us to share with others: the Love that flows from the open side of Christ for each and everyone. We thank the Lord for Father Dehon and his spiritual children, for the fathers who have accompanied us, for the spiritual and human friendship with which they have supported us even at a distance.

The lay "voice" has been called to walk by him or herself, but we realize that we may always "invoke" the presence of our bigger brothers, our travel companions, faithful caretakers, spiritual guides, to be there with us as prophets in our area. (Signatures to follow)

D. Discussion and sharing

In the group you can share 'seeds' of the Dehonian Family and ask what conversions and attitudes must grow in your area.

E. A Moment of prayer

Prayer for the Dehonian Family

Blessed are you, Father,
God of mercy and source of all consolation,
who have chosen us freely from the beginning of the world,
to be holy and without fault in charity.
It is why we enter, every day more deeply, into the unfathomable secrets of Love,
in the Heart of your Son Jesus,
on the path set out by Father Dehon.

We want to thank you, Father.
because the humble seed planted in your Church,
has been growing and developing,
as a messenger of love and reconciliation,
among so many nations and peoples scattered throughout the world.

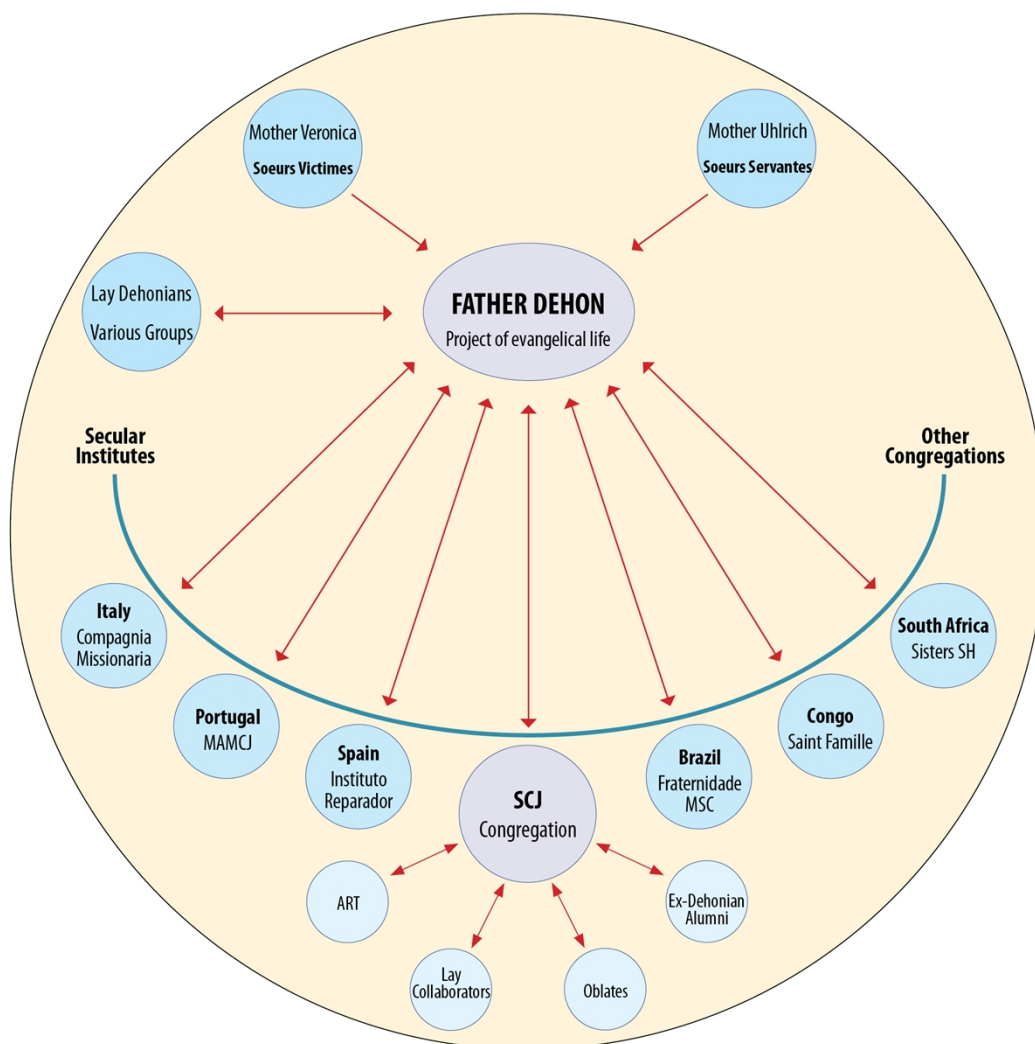
To you be praise and glory
because you have inspired your children to abandon themselves into your hands,
and like Jesus to give themselves to you every day,
with generosity and in the gift of themselves for the salvation of others.

You, who direct the course of the times,
illuminate our footsteps,
so that our presence in the Church and in the world
may be a sign of reconciliation, solidarity.
May we proclaim your kingdom among the poor, the marginalized,
and those looking for the bread of every day.

Enlighten the Dehonian Family with the gifts of your Holy Spirit:
so that a new Pentecost may spring up to announce you
in the streets and homes of our people,
so that your Kingdom may be in souls and societies.

And may Mary, mother of Jesus, accompany us and teach us to receive you,
so that we may be as available as she was, to her words of life.
AMEN.

2. The **graph** of the Dehonian Family made by Fr. Virginio Bressanelli



At the center of the Dehonian Family is not the SCJ Congregation but the **project of Evangelical Life of Fr. Dehon**. The **Congregation** has the task of helping to discern, form, accompany, help and support. In the SCJ Congregation, the **Oblates** and the **A.R.T. Association** (Adveniat Regnum Tuum) participate in the charism of Fr. Dehon.

The **ex-alumni of the Dehonians**, as well as the lay collaborators, do not necessarily participate in the charism of Fr. Dehon.

The co-workers share in the mission and the activities and the ex-alumni have an affective bond with the Congregation.

Dehonian lay people participate in the charism of Fr. Dehon. They can become involved, but not necessarily in the prayer, mission and life of the SCJ community.

The **other Congregations** and **Secular Institutes** have their own founder, who invited them to share in the spirituality of Fr. Dehon. They must state explicitly whether they intend to be part of the Dehonian Family.

3. *Experience of Dehonian Family: 'Mission to the People' at Volta Mantovana (Mantova)*
[Italy – October 2004]

The mission to the people lived at Volta Mantovana (MN) was an experience of the Church and also an experience of Dehonian Family because it has seen the collaboration of three components: religious, secular consecrated and laity, animated by the same spirituality and the same charism. It is a gift of grace given to us to live, of which we are grateful.

I cannot "guess" what each one of you and all of you together expect of the mission, nor do I know to say what will happen. I know only one thing to say to you, out of my experience: it is not so much better to ask oneself what do we want, but what does the Lord wants to tell and wants to do in the days of a mission. Therefore, the important thing that one has to do is, to strain the ear, listen when the Lord knocks, to open the door, the mind and the heart, and let him in.

These are the words of our bishop, Mons. Egidio Caporello, who has accompanied from the beginning the preparation of the parish mission, guided by the missionary company of the Sacred Heart.

Strain the ear, to listen to the knocks of the Lord, to open the door, mind and heart and to let him enter: We are listening to Him with this attitude in our heart. We have heard him calling and have opened our heart and He entered, remained with us, but his discourse and his gestures have surprised us, as had happened with the disciples and so has repeated them with us just as He did with the disciples. *It is not you who has chosen me but I chose you and have formed you and I continue to form you, that you may go and bear fruit and that the fruit may remain. And still: it is not important that you be a small thing and that the situation be bigger than you are, put in my arms that small thing you have; then, with me, you yourselves give them to eat.*

Fluency and spiritual disarmament before Christ the Lord. A mandate, to which one cannot subtract when had done the experience of his love for each one of us and for every creature. And, being aware that we are a small thing, we have responded our 'yes', here am I, into the hands of the bishop, available *to do all that He tells you.*

In this way, some of laity of the land have lived and have shared with the missionary companions and with the two missionary fathers, the parish mission from 13th to 24th of October 2014.

With the modality and different times, in relation to our family and work responsibilities (jobs).

Some of us have opened their houses to host the missionaries and others to welcome the centers of listening, the Word, the others still have accompanied the missionaries in their families, while the others have visited the families and animated the centers of listening. The presence of the laity is a different characteristic but we compliment it for the service given to the consecrated and we believe in the reciprocal richness.

The visiting of the families and the centers of listening were the two moments that made the missionaries busy but always and every day they were followed by the intensive moments of prayer and the celebration. The common appointments: The Eucharist and the Adoration. It's to bring together everyone at the foot of the Lord, to celebrate His love, to submit the persons that meet, to intercede for them, to thank with them, to put in His hands the five loaves of bread and the two fish that each one of us is, because of His grace.

In living the mission, we, the consecrated and laity were capable to listen, to look and to confront. We are grateful for one another because of the resources that we have had in our sharing of the

days, the prayers, the service to the others and in the dialogue with one another. Because, each and every one with their proper characteristics, be it the vocation to religious, consecrated and laity is a reciprocal gift.

And, walking together, it is given to us to recognize the mission like the grace and like a place in which it is made visible a bud of the dehonian family, flowered in a joint venture: a service of the evangelization to the local community.

Final Celebration

THE GIFT OF THE CROSS, LIGHT AND SALT

Introduction

For Christians the cross, a sign of the most terrible of punishments, is the tree of life, the thalamus, the throne, the altar of the new covenant. From Christ, the new Adam asleep on the cross, came forth the wondrous sacrament of the Church. The cross is the sign of the Lordship of Christ over those who in baptism are made like him in death and in the Father's glory (cf. Rom 6: 5). In the patristic tradition the cross is the sign of the Son of man who will appear at the end of time (Mt 24, 30). Marked by the cross of the Lord, the Christian must be light and salt in the world.

Song

Prayer

P. *Let us pray:*

O Father, you wanted to save humanity with the Cross of Christ, your Son, grant that we who have known its mystery of love, may live it faithfully and give witness to it by becoming light and salt of the world. Through our Lord Jesus Christ your Son, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever.

All: Amen.

Gospel reading

From the Gospel according to John

In that time Jesus said to Nicodemus:

No one has ascended into heaven except the one who descended from heaven, the Son of Man. And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life. "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life. "Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.

The Word of the Lord.

Homily

On the feast of the Exaltation of the Cross the Christian holds together two sides of the one event: the Cross and Easter: the cross of the Risen One with all its disasters, the resurrection of the Crucified One with all its light. To paraphrase Kant: "The cross without the resurrection is blind; the resurrection without the cross is empty."

God has loved so much. This is the burning heart of Christianity, the synthesis of our faith: "What holds it all together is your heart" (Evangelii Gaudium 143). "We are not Christians because we love God. We are Christians because we believe that God loves us" (L. Xardel). Salvation is that He loves me, not that I love Him. The only real Christian heresy is indifference, the exact opposite of love. What thwarts even the strongest patterns of the history of God is in truth indifference.

In fact, "to love so much," is the work of God, and from God it passes to the true children of God. And I think that whenever a creature loves so much at that moment he or she is doing a divine thing, and, in that moment, is born a son and daughter of God, the incarnation of God's project.

God so loved the world. These are words to be repeated ad infinitum. They should be written on the flesh of the heart, to be constantly cherished. It is a chorus that contains the essential music. Whenever there is a doubt in our heart, we should repeat again and again. So deeply God loves the world that he gave: to love is not an emotion, to love is to give, to give generously, without logic, madly. And God cannot give anything less than himself (Meister Eckhart). God did not send his Son to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. God saved the world, did not condemn it. Each time we fear judgments, for the shadows that we leave behind, we are pagans, we have not understood anything about the cross. And so, every time we cast judgments, we have become pagans again, back pagans, finding ourselves outside, written out of the story of God.

He saved the world, with all that is in it. To save means to preserve, nothing will be lost: no gesture of love, no act of courage, no act of perseverance, no face. Even the smallest blade of grass. Because all creation demands is, all creation groans with the labor pains of salvation.

Because whoever believes in him will not perish, but have eternal life. To believe in this God, to enter this dynamic, to allow him to come into us, to enter the divine space "of loving so much" to give confidence, to trust in love as a form of God and a form of living means to have eternal life, to do the things that God is doing', things that do not deserve to die, that belong to the most intimate fibers of God. Whoever does this already, in the present time, has eternal life, a full life, a fully realized existence.

After the homily, the priest or the presiding lay person invites all to pray. He or she can do this with these or similar words.

We turn our praise and prayer to God the Father, the giver of all good things, for our brothers and sisters who in different regions of the world bring the good news of salvation in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

All pray in silence.

Then the priest or lay person prays a prayer of blessing:

We bless you and praise you, O God,
because in the mysterious plan of your mercy
You sent your Son into the world to free us from the bondage of sin
through the outpouring of his blood
and fill us with the gifts of the Holy Spirit.
He, the conqueror of death, before returning to you, Father,
sent the Apostles, vicars of His love and his royal power,
to preach to the nations the Gospel of life
and to immerse believers in the regenerative waters of Baptism.

Look, Lord, at these your servants,
who, invested with the sign of the cross,

we are sending as messengers of salvation and peace.
Guide their steps with your right hand
and support them with the power of your grace,
so that they do fall down
under the weight of their apostolic labors.

May their words resound with the voice of Christ
and may many who listen to them
be attracted to the obedience to the Gospel.
Pour into their hearts your Holy Spirit,
because, being all things to all people,
they may lead to you, O Father, a great number of children
so that in the Holy Church they may praise you without end.
Through Christ our Lord.

All: Amen.

Oblation

L. Brothers and sisters, we know love by this, that he laid down his life for us – and we ought to lay down our lives for one another.” (1 John 3: 16). Pronounce your act of oblation.

**We bless you, Father,
in union with Jesus, your Son,
lifted up from the earth for our salvation.
From his open side we welcome the gift of the Spirit,
in his sacrifice for the salvation of the world.
We offer you our lives,
and all that we are and have.
They are the gift of your love.
Welcome also our Christian and dehonian witness
that it may be light and salt of the world
which you have loved and saved
with the cross of your Son.
May our life, crucified with Christ,
become a priestly service
for the coming of your kingdom.
Amen.**

Handing over of the Cross

If a priest presides, he blesses the cross with the following words:

Lord, holy Father,

**you wanted to make the cross of your Son
the origin of every blessing
and the source of all grace,
Bless ✠ these crosses
and help those who bear them before people
in their efforts to renew them
in the image of your Son.
He lives and reigns for ever and ever.
All: amen.**

*Then the missionaries approach the priest one by one to receive the cross.
As they receive the cross, he says:*

**Receive this sign of the love of Christ
and of our faith.
Preach Christ crucified,
God's power and wisdom of God.**

The missionary replies: Amen.

Each one receives the cross, kisses it and returns to his or her place.

*Depending on the circumstances, the priest may hand out the cross to the whole group at once,
saying:*

**Receive Cross
sign of Christ's charity
and of your mission
for which the Church has chosen you.**

All missionaries respond: Amen.

If there is no priest, make sure that the crosses have been blessed beforehand. The one who presides over the ceremony then hands over the crosses as above.

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