

Spiritual Path for Dehonian Associates

Tenth Meeting

Mary, the Model of a Dehonian Associate

Objectives

1. to maintain a sense of welcome and belonging among the participants
2. to understand the significance of Mary, not only as the mother of Jesus, but also as a model disciple and mother of the Church
3. to accept Mary as the model for Dehonian Associates, particularly in their life of oblation
4. to appreciate, that for Dehonian Associates, “the Word is made flesh,” in the supportive and disappointing aspects of daily living and working
5. to celebrate Dehonian spirituality that has the capacity to nurture and sustain a relationship of love and union with God

Preparation and Notes

1. If possible, arrange the seating in a circle with a low, circular table placed at the center.
2. Place on the table a candle, an image of Mary, preferably *Our Lady of the Heart of Jesus*, and perhaps some flowers or a plant. The candle should already be lit when the participants are gathering.
3. Choose a CD with soft, instrumental background music and decide on the best way to play the CD [either with a CD player or on a computer]. Have this music playing while the participants are gathering.
4. Have sufficient copies of the prayer card [the prayer, “Gracious God” on one side, and an image of Our Lady of the Heart of Jesus on the other] available for the participants.
5. Make sure someone can introduce and lead the sung mantra, “United to the Heart of Christ.”
6. *Before the meeting*, ask two of the participants to prepare the reading, “The Identity of a Dehonian Associate,” and three other participants to prepare the readings for the closing prayer.
7. The meeting should last no longer than two hours. It is important not to exceed this time limit. Meetings that last longer than advertised tend to be the last ones some people attend. The meeting should include a 10-15 minute break. One is suggested in the outline, but the dynamic of the group will suggest the most opportune time.

Welcome

A greeting and a welcome back, preferably from an SCJ, to all those attending the tenth meeting. If some participants are attending for the first time, welcome them warmly and invite the members of the group to introduce themselves to each other.

Prayer

- **Instrumental background music:** *if the music is not playing, begin it now without introduction. Allow about a minute before beginning the Centering exercise.*
- **Centering exercise:** *slowly move through these suggestions, allowing time for the participants to follow your suggestions.*
 - ✓ As we begin a short time of prayer, I invite you to quiet yourself and relax.
 - ✓ It may help to close your eyes.
 - ✓ It may help to fill your lungs with deep breaths, and then exhale slowly.
 - ✓ Find a comfortable position in your chair; let the chair safely hold you.
 - ✓ As best as you can in this moment, enter into the depths of your heart, which is a place where God dwells.
- **Guided meditation:** *slowly move through these steps, allowing time for the participants to follow your suggestions.*
 - ✓ Having arrived at the depths of your heart, or as close as you can come in this moment, what do you notice? It could be an image, a feeling, a color, or nothing at all, which is itself an image.
 - ✓ Bring to your awareness your favorite image of Mary, the mother of Jesus and the faithful follower of Jesus. What is it about this image that most attracts you? What does it mean for you?
 - ✓ Try to notice something new about this image, an aspect of this image that you never noticed before.
 - ✓ Ask Mary to show you the most important aspect of this image.
 - ✓ Take a moment to be grateful to Mary as a model Christian and for the image that reminds you of her example. Then allow Mary to thank you for listening to and following her Son.
 - ✓ Gently bring your awareness back to this circle. When you are ready, open your eyes.
- When everyone has opened his or her eyes, turn off the music.

- Distribute the prayer card and invite the participants to pray this prayer in unison:

**Gracious God,
from the arms of Mary you received your son
presented in the temple,
the first fruits of a life of complete oblation.
Accept us too,
so that, sanctified by Christ's offering,
we may live in your presence
for the salvation of our brothers and sisters.**

**On Calvary
you joined a mother's compassion
to the passion of your son,
so giving her a share in his sacrifice.
With Mary's oblation,
accept the offering of this day
as a continuation in us
of Christ's death and resurrection
for the redemption of the world.
Amen.**

Review of Ninth Meeting

- the symbol of the Heart of Jesus represents the person of Jesus
- there are many visual interpretations of the Heart of Jesus
- every visual interpretation of the Heart of Jesus offers a different insight into the person of Jesus and his relationship with humanity
- devotion to the Heart of Jesus requires that our hearts gradually conform to Jesus' thoughts and actions.

Sharing

- Invite each participant to share their reflection upon these two questions:
 - ✓ What does the image of Mary as mother of Jesus, and mother of the Church, mean to you?
 - ✓ What quality of Mary's faith do you most want to make your own?
- After each individual shares, the group sings this mantra:



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Presentation: Mary, the Model of a Dehonian Associate

In 1877, Fr. Dehon traveled with Bishop Thibaudier, who was to fulfill his obligation to present the Pope with his regular assessment of the diocese. On their way to Rome, they lodged in several cities and took in the sights. On February 14, they were in Loreto, Italy, and celebrated Mass in the Holy House, which pious legend holds is the Palestinian home of Mary. In this house, she received the angel Gabriel's message that she would become the mother of Jesus. The words inscribed above the altar of this shrine summarize what took place: "Here, the Word was made flesh." Tradition says that angels transferred this house from Galilee to Loreto in 1294.

Visiting the Holy House again in 1894, Dehon records in his diary the memory of his previous experience, noting that was "in 1877 with Bishop Thibaudier, a few months before founding the Congregation." He makes the connection explicit in a letter to an early member of the community, writing of his return visit to the Holy House and remarking, "Here the Congregation was born in 1877. May the Congregation rediscover a new life on this day."

With both visits to the Holy House, Fr. Dehon experienced a profound movement of grace. What inspired him was not so much his presence in the actual home of Mary, which Dehon truly believed it to be, but rather what this space symbolized. Indeed, Dehon took literally the words, “Here, the Word was made flesh,” but more importantly, he received an insight into how this mystery unfolded.

For Fr. Dehon, the Incarnation involves the meeting of two oblations—the self-offering of the Word, who desires to enter the world; and the self-offering of Mary, in whose body the Word takes flesh. Regarding the *Oblates of the Heart of Jesus*, the original name of the Congregation which he founded, Dehon writes in the *Spiritual Directory*,

Our whole vocation, our purpose, our duties, our promises are found in these words, “Behold, I come to do your will,” and “Behold the handmaid of the Lord, be it done to me according to your word.”

Elaborating, Dehon spells out the consequences of this spirituality of oblation.

In all circumstances, in all happenings for the future and for the present, the *Ecce venio* suffices, provided it is in the mind and heart at the same time that it is on the lips. Behold me ready to do, to undertake, to suffer what you wish, and to sacrifice whatever you ask of me. We can be without anxiety; the will of God will make itself known at every moment. But, should darkness and uncertainty fill our mind and heart, let us persevere with patience and love, until it pleases the wisdom and goodness of God to enlighten us again with his light.

For Fr. Dehon, this spirit of oblation was tested multiple times during the first years of the Congregation. When miscommunications caused the Vatican to suppress the Oblates in 1883, Dehon responded, “I cannot entertain, even for an instant, the slightest thought of resistance.” When misinformation moved Bishop Thibaudier in 1889 to insist that the Priests of the Sacred Heart merge with a more established Congregation, Dehon wrote, “I am ready to dissolve it, if that is what our Lord wants.” When unsubstantiated rumors encouraged Bishop Duval in 1893 to strip Fr. Dehon of his authority as rector of St. John’s Institute and as Superior General, Dehon replied, “With the help of his grace, I am ready to do and to suffer whatever Our Lord asks.”

All of this “darkness and uncertainty” accompanied Fr. Dehon on his second visit to the Holy House in 1894, along with an *Ecce venio* in his mind and heart. As he remembers that the Congregation was born in a spirit of oblation, he prays that faithfulness to this spirit will help “the Congregation rediscover new life on this day.”

For Dehonian Associates, who profess to live a life of oblation, it is in the “Holy House” of daily living and working, however supportive or disappointing, where “the Word is made flesh” today.

In the tradition of the Priests of the Sacred Heart, the image of *Our Lady of the Heart of Jesus* serves as a reminder of the mystery of the Incarnation, as Fr. Leo John Dehon understood it. In his meditation book, *Crowns of Love for the Sacred Heart* [Volume I, 1st Mystery, 6th Meditation], Dehon reflects upon the relationship between Jesus and Mary.

Each beat of the Heart of Jesus, has, so to speak, its echo in the heart of Mary so that the love of these two hearts is one, and has one object, one desire; namely, to give oneself to humankind. Jesus gave himself to his Father and to souls by his act of oblation. He now burns with ardor to begin the redemption, and inflames Mary with his zeal.

Their two hearts are as one. What love they manifest to us; what a lesson of zeal they teach! Does not the goodness of Jesus and Mary evoke boundless confidence and gratitude? O Jesus with Mary, I give myself to your Heart, to your love; with you I give myself to your Father.

The Gospels present Mary as a faithful disciple. In the image of *Our Lady of the Sacred Heart*, Mary gestures toward the Heart of her Son, suggesting that the heart of a faithful disciple beats as one with the Heart of Jesus. In response to the angel Gabriel’s message, she said, “Here I am, the servant of the Lord, let it be with me according to your word” [Luke 1:38]. When Mary heard the shepherds repeat the good news they received and when she tried to make sense of her young son’s reasoning for staying behind in the Jerusalem Temple, “She treasured all these things and pondered them in her heart” [Luke 2:19, 51].

With deep sorrow and strong faith, Mary stood at the foot of the cross [John 19:25]. With peaceful confidence and complete openness, Mary prayed in the midst of the disciples awaiting the gift of the Holy Spirit [Acts 1:14]. For this reason, the *Dehonian Associates Rule of Life* states that Mary “inspires us to openness in faith. She is the perfect image of our consecrated life.”

Break [10-15 minutes]

Reflection on Dehonian Associates Rule of Life

- Invite the participants to reflect upon the following number from the Dehonian Associates *Rule of Life*, which focuses on the spiritual heritage we have received from Fr. Dehon. Read the paragraph aloud and ask the participants to follow along in their personal copy of the *Rule*. Then, ask the following questions:
 - ✓ What does this paragraph mean to you?
 - ✓ Give a specific example of how you might live this out in your daily life.

63. As Mother of Jesus, Mary is intimately united with the life and redemptive work of her Son. Through her maternal intercession she is present as Mother of the Church to us who work with Jesus for the re-birth of people. She stands out among the poor and humble of the Lord, who confidently await and receive salvation from him. In her words, *Behold the handmaid of the Lord, be it done to me according to your word* [Luke 1:38], she inspires us to openness in faith. She is the perfect image of our consecrated life.

The Identity of a Dehonian Associate

- As one way to bring closure to this ten session *Spiritual Path*, invite the participants to listen to the identity of a Dehonian Associate and to consider what they have experienced and learned in this group.

Reader One: A Dehonian Associate recognizes in the faith experience of Fr. Leo John Dehon a specific approach to the spiritual life that has as its foundation the contemplation of the open side and pierced Heart of Jesus, which signifies his oblation to his Father and to people,

Reader Two: that understands union with the oblation of Jesus Christ to be the principle and center of one's life and that takes Mary, the mother of Jesus, as a model of a life of oblation,

Reader One: that participates in Jesus' work of redemption by being prophets of love and servants of reconciliation,

Reader Two: that nourishes this union and collaboration with Jesus by meditating on Scripture, celebrating the Eucharist, and forming community,

Reader One: and that renews this consecration daily by offering a prayer of oblation as can be found in the *Dehonian Associates Prayer Book*.

Reader Two: A Dehonian Associate pledges to put this Dehonian charism into practice, whether within the family, in a profession, or in other groups of Church or society,

Reader One: is faithful to the Dehonian Associates monthly gatherings for study and prayer, and supports spiritually everyone preparing to become a Dehonian Associate

- Provide a few moments of quiet to allow the participants to reflect on these words and then ask each one to share what they have experienced and learned in this group over the past ten sessions.

Prayerful Celebration

- Begin by singing the mantra, “United to the Heart of Christ.”
- Reader One: **Luke 1:38**
Behold the handmaid of the Lord, be it done to me according to your word.
- Sing mantra, “United to the Heart of Christ.”
- Reader Two: **Dehonian Associates Rule of Life #63**
As Mother of Jesus, Mary is intimately united with the life and redemptive work of her Son. She inspires us to openness in faith. She is the perfect image of our consecrated life.
- Sing mantra, “United to the Heart of Christ.”
- Reader Three: **Fr. Leo John Dehon**, *Crowns of Love for the Sacred Heart I*, [1st Mystery, 6th Meditation]
Each beat of the Heart of Jesus, has, so to speak, its echo in the heart of Mary so that the love of these two hearts is one, and has one object, one desire; namely, to give oneself to humankind.
- Sing mantra, “United to the Heart of Christ.”
- Invite spontaneous prayer by participants. This can take the form of a word or phrase that they take with them from the meeting, or a prayer of petition, thanksgiving, or praise. Allow enough quiet time to encourage the introverts to take part.
- When this sharing seems to be finished, sing mantra, “United to the Heart of Christ.”
- Join hands and pray together the “Our Father.”
- Make any necessary announcements for the Dehonian Associates commitment ceremony.
- Invite participants to take with them the prayer card.