

### **Sacred Heart Seminary and School of Theology: Your Seminary**

Good morning. Thank you so much Fr. Ed for the invitation to address you, the SCJs here, and your alumni this morning as you begin your provincial assembly. I am also very grateful to Fr. Ed and the Provincial Council for the great trust and confidence which he and they have placed in me as I begin my service as the new President-Rector of Sacred Heart Seminary and School of Theology. Although I do not officially begin until the first of July, I have spent the last month and a half actively involved in seminary related meetings and events. This has given me the chance to listen actively and ask needed questions to get as broad a picture as possible of what my role and service entails.

As noted, I have a long history with Sacred Heart. I was hired in 1988 to establish the Hispanic Studies Program, one of the first of its kind in a seminary. Over the course of 24 years I had the privilege of working with Frs. Jerry Clifford, Jim Brackin, Tom Cassidy, and Jan de Jong among other SCJs. I also served as a professor of Systematic Theology, Vice Rector and then Vice President of Academic Affairs before leaving to take a job with the Association of Theological Schools (ATS) in 2012. It was short lived, however, since I was elected as Vicar General of the Salvatorians in Rome for a six-year term which ended this past December. At that time, Fr. Ed invited me to interview for the position of President-Rector of Sacred Heart. But actually, the first time I interviewed for the position of President-Rector was 8 years ago (fall of 2011) just before I left for ATS.

I said then that I was convinced that Sacred Heart was moving toward greatness. Since returning, it is obvious that Sacred Heart is not the same seminary I left in 2012, nor am I the same person. Upon returning to Sacred Heart I see just how far the seminary has advanced and is truly on the verge of greatness. I believe this is due not only to the dedication, hard work, and unwavering commitment of the SCJs but also of the administrators, staff, faculty, and board of directors who have endured some difficult times recently. I am especially pleased by the dynamism brought to Sacred Heart by Fr. Tom Knoebel and the improved relationship to the SCJ Provincial, his council, and the Province.

Fr. Tom has inspired the Seminary community, and I suspect the SCJs as well, with his vision linked to Jeremiah 29:11-12: namely, “For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans for your welfare and not for your harm to

give you a future with hope...” “A future with hope.” I sense this hope coursing through the life of the seminary, especially as they wonder who I am and what my leadership will be like.

Well, while Fr. Tom has been a visionary, I am a dreamer. At a gathering of youth in North Macedonia earlier this year, Pope Francis decried the lack of dreaming among the youth of today. So, he admonished them to dream, and to dream big! I take my inspiration from his words as well as from the prophet Joel 3:1: “it shall come to pass I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh, your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions.”

I am now in my mid-60s, an old man to some, but certainly with dreams. When I began teaching at Sacred Heart, I was in my mid-30s. Even then I envisioned a bright and glorious future for Sacred Heart. Today I dream of Sacred Heart as a place of excellent priestly and religious formation. I dream of a full house of diocesan and religious seminarians and with programs full of students, where bishops and religious superiors will want to send their seminarians and where men and women, lay and religious will want to study. That is because I dream it will be a place full of prestige that enjoys national and international fame for its superb theological, spiritual, pastoral, and human formation, and as a holy place where the world meets to encounter and extend the reign of God.

Yes, I am a dreamer, but I also have my feet on the ground. For dreams can only be achieved if we take care of those things that will help us move forward to attain them. And it is clear that one of those things is the continued support and dedication of the SCJs to the future of the seminary. A sign of this is the investment you are making in renovating the building. Thank you for your generosity and vision, for...

Sacred Heart is your seminary. It is an important apostolate of the US Province as well as your world-wide community as one of only three major Dehonian seminaries in the world. Along with your other apostolates, I’m sure that the alumni here would agree that Sacred Heart adds to the prestige of your presence and charism in the US making it visible here and around the world. Because of this it is imperative that the SCJ charism and Dehonian spirituality be an integral part of the life and purpose of the seminary. What’s more, it’s my

ardent hope that I'll be succeeded by an SCJ when my term ends, and this requires a large investment including the right attitude, commitment, preparation, and knowledge of what is required of a major seminary to function and succeed in the US.

Also, it is important that Sacred Heart have a connection to the other two SCJ major seminaries so that the Dehonian spirit grows at Sacred Heart. At the same time, it is very important that SCJs recognize that the administration, staff, faculty and board of directors of Sacred Heart are your partners: the spirit of Fr. Dehon and his charism are at work here. Like all charisms it was a gift to Fr. Dehon, and so to you, as an instrument of God's life and salvation at the service of Church and society. Consequently, I believe because of that Sacred Heart, with its administration, staff, faculty, and board of directors add to the richness of the expression of his charism in the US and beyond. And we offer you our dedication and collaboration in this regard.

Furthermore, as a result of my six years in Rome it has become very clear to me that the future of religious congregations involves greater collaboration and sharing of resources in order to move into the future and bring our unique perspective to bear on the life of the Church. I see the motto used recently at the international SCJ formation gathering, "With Open Heart and Open Mind," as well as my appointment, as a sign of this.

So, what do I envision for Sacred Heart? I see a place where God's reign, God's kingdom, is flourishing. This is linked to the Dehonian value expressed in the motto *Adveniat Regnum Tuum*. It has already taken root at Sacred Heart; now it is our duty to contribute to its growth and development. This is done by all involved, not by one person alone.

Therefore, I envision that everyone associated with Sacred Heart is responsible for its success in accomplishing what Christ is asking of the seminary and what the Holy Spirit is guiding it to be. I certainly do not have all the answers, nor is my vision perfectly clear. Therefore, if I am to make any difference at all it is because I am able to cooperate with God's work in me and in others: I am incomplete without them and they are incomplete without me.

Even so I have a strong sense of what God wants for Sacred Heart regarding our life in the heart of Christ as seen in the four areas of formation, in terms of

the life of the seminary and in terms of relations with the SCJs and other sponsors both diocesan and religious. I have a strong sense also of what God wants of Sacred Heart in terms of service to the Church and to the world, and in terms of why I have been chosen to be rector at this time. I am only the third Hispanic rector of a major seminary in the US and only the first native-born, thanks to you.

Basically, I envision Sacred Heart offering a new model of seminary and theological study that will help the Church move toward a future with fewer priests and more collaborative ministry among diocesans, religious, and laity. For that reason, Sacred Heart is more than an SCJ seminary: it belongs to something larger, God's purpose.

With this in mind, the foundation of all that we do is clearly our relationship with Jesus Christ: it has to be the center of everything to which we aspire, everything we do, and for everything which we hope. There has to be a dialogue, a connection, between what we study in the classroom or what we do in our offices, and what we pray in the chapel. I see this captured in your expression *In Corde Jesu*.

Therefore, I envision our graduates and those who participate in our programs as people who not only have a healthy relationship with Christ but who also are in touch with their humanity in a healthy way, who are capable of understanding and responding to the human condition with compassion and with the heart of Christ. I see them as persons who are able to love others because they themselves have been loved. I see them as persons who are able to treat others as they wish to be treated. I see them as persons who are able to create unity in diversity as expressed in the SCJ motto *Cor Unum*.

In sum, I envision our graduates and those who participate in our programs as persons who have received the appropriate type of formation whether they are diocesan, religious or lay so that they can live, move and have their being in Christ. And so help conform the world to the heart of Christ.

What kinds of programs do I envision? I have noted a great bubbling up of ideas and initiatives that have developed at Sacred Heart during the time I have been away. This ferment is wonderful, and I hope that it will continue. At the same time, we need to always assess what Sacred Heart is truly capable of doing at a

given time due to real limits and the need to be well focused on what Christ is asking of us at this time in order to move toward the future.

For Sacred Heart to be able to respond to the changing needs of the Church and the people around us, I envision Sacred Heart continuing to develop the excellent MDiv and academic programs offered while upholding appropriate academic standards. But also, Sacred Heart needs to continue incorporating various ways of learning and teaching (conferences, workshops, lectures, seminars, cohorts, mentoring, study tours, etc.). It should also be creative in this regard. Furthermore, Sacred Heart needs to continue seeing priestly formation, whether diocesan or religious, as situated at the heart of the purpose of Sacred Heart.

Because of this Sacred Heart needs to devise a formation program appropriate for diocesan and religious candidates for priestly ministry. Too often both diocesan and religious formation programs do more to infantilize those who go through them than to help them become fully what they are being called to be as priests and/or religious. Our experience with older vocations should give us insights into how to overcome this as well as to minimize the tendency towards clericalism.

In terms of academics, I envision the continued development of the *Cor Unum* MA program, with its well-rounded cohort model of learning beyond the purely academic. I especially applaud its goal of graduates prepared to heal a fractured world. And Sacred Heart should continue to offer the *Lumen Cordis* MA in theology for those who want or need something slightly different. Also, the new distance-learning MA, *Adveniat Regnum Tuum* program with SCJ seminarians in India provides Sacred Heart another avenue for serving the world-wide Church and establishes it in a unique position among seminaries. Hopefully this can be expanded to other SCJ units and other religious communities.

In addition to continuing the two Dehon Lectures and the yearly Lux Lecture, I see Sacred Heart needs to offer periodic symposia on timely topics, such as the recent one on Pope Francis and the philosophical and theological foundations of his magisterium. We also have to make sure to open these events to the general public so that Sacred Heart is of greater service to the wider community and Church. This includes opening Sacred Heart to outside religious groups to use spaces for their particular needs as appropriate including offering

sabbatical programs, retreats, and speakers among other things. The most recent lecture was given by Sr. Norma Pimental and was an excellent example of collaboration between the SCJs and the seminary for the cause of social justice and added prestige to you and to Sacred Heart.

I applaud the great initiative of expanding the ESL program from more than just learning English into the “English and Cultural Studies Program” (ECSP). And I hope to see the bridge program, which is part of this initiative, promoted and developed more. Together with the BA/MDIV program with Cardinal Stritch University it offers an appealing alternative to the traditional way of progressing through the usual educational system still in force.

And of course, I see that the Hispanic Studies program needs to continue and also adapt to the changing reality of the Hispanic presence in the US Church and beyond. In this program we truly have the possibility of fostering bridges of understanding and mutual respect for those who are often excluded from the power structures within the Church and society. I am especially pleased to see how far Fr. Jim Walters has developed a new way of teaching pastoral Spanish and I look forward to the publication of his book.

The Lux Center for Jewish/Catholic Dialogue also is an important element in the effort to build bridges and foster greater respect among peoples. I thank you for your grant to this program since it and the Hispanic Studies program are also important signs of the SCJ value of promoting social justice. In these programs this value is most evident, and they are a good launching pad for the values of Social Justice to have greater influence within Sacred Heart.

As I close, I see that Sacred Heart can be a space where the concerns of the Church and society can meet and thus contribute to the furtherance of the reign of God in the world. Truly Sacred Heart under the leadership of Fr. Tom Knoebel has claimed a future with hope. I see my role as helping it to fulfill this hope by dreaming big dreams that are being fulfilled and so making Sacred Heart more and more a place where all will see the face of God in us and his life vibrant and strong coursing through all those associated with the seminary. I am convinced that it is He who is moving among us, gently, leading, drawing us on into all that is new and good and lovely. For I believe that all He has in mind for us is good, that He desires life and not death for Sacred Heart. This is why he loves Sacred Heart so much and

has helped it to continue forward. The signs of this are already evident. Sacred Heart is truly capable of helping conform the world to the heart of Christ. May we be apt instruments of His life and His salvation. And may Sacred Heart continue to make you proud to be a part of it, for Sacred Heart is your seminary.