

**Opening of the Provincial Conference**  
**January 7, 2020**

Welcome Brothers,

We gather again for this Third Provincial Conference: **“Our Future Together in Community and Ministry Part III.”**

I thank you all for taking the time out of your busy schedules, your ministries and your free time to be present during these days together. These are important days for all of us as we look to our future as a Province.

We have come a long way since we gathered for the first time from **January 30-February 1, 2018** and last year from **January 8-10, 2019**.

When we gathered together in 2018 we are all aware that there are fewer SCJs available for ministry; many burdens are placed on those in local leadership. There is concern that local superiors and pastors (or pastoral team leaders) are not getting the collaborative support that they need, or that simply too much is being asked of them/you.

The theme for that Conference was: “Our Future: Together in Community and Ministry.” As I’m sure you’re aware, each Conference has the same title but with Part II or now Part III.

We were asked in 2018 to work together to create a vision for how we can best live and serve together in a way that is healthy and life-giving. We looked at new ways of doing ministry to guard against burn-out, including greater use of lay staff.

We also looked at ways in which local communities, and the province, can be more supportive to those in ministry.

That first conference provided an opportunity to look at what is sustainable and how members of the province can sustain each other as confreres, as brothers.

That conference was, in a way, a stepping stone toward planning for the future, including the needs of internal ministries.

The 2018 conference helped us to realize that our local communities and ministries are becoming more multicultural; we hoped that that would continue to increase in the future as more SCJs from other entities come to the US Province. It has. We have five men here who not here three year ago.

We asked: “How can SCJs from other cultures be better prepared for community life and ministry in this Province and how can current members better welcome our international confreres?”

I believe the province is very good at addressing the administration of welcoming an international SCJ (such as immigration paperwork and ESL studies) but more needs to be done in preparing individuals for life and service in a culture different than their own. I believe that is now happening in name (English and Cultural Studies) and in reality.

Expectations, we said, needed to be clarified regarding how members of a community work together to support the ministries attached to it.

There needs to be space for people to be individuals, but the community’s needs and concerns should take priority over the

individual's. As Dehonians we must be present both in community and ministry.

A number of questions were asked at that conference; including:

- How do SCJs balance individual needs and desires with that of community and ministry?
- How do local communities and ministries have the conversations needed to help everyone “get on the same sheet of music or the same page?”
- Are members of the province properly prepared for the responsibilities that they are given?
- Are young priests prepared for the administrative tasks of being a pastor? Do they need to be, or could such tasks be handled by a lay employee?
- Should the province look at other models of ministry; can it reimagine how current ministries operate?

Originally, we thought that the 2018 conference was the time to seriously look at the possibility of seeking a new ministry. We have long talked about this need in our province. For example, we have said we would like to be in “Youth Ministry”, of one kind or another. As we invite confreres from other “entities”, we thought that it was the time to prepare for this new ministry? In reality we didn't get there in 2018. We barely had time to discuss it.

Last year, in 2019, we gathered again for Part II. That gathering was a continuation of the work and discussions that we began the year before. As with that 2018 conference, one of the major themes last year was **multiculturalism**, and in particular, **Interculturality** in our Province and local communities.

Some of our discussions last year focused on Fr. Anthony J. Gittins' book, *Living Mission Interculturally*, His concepts and ideas served as a resource for follow-up activities to that provincial conference.

Our presentations and discussions focused on community living, including community prayer, meals and communication, as well as wider issues such as the changing culture of the Church in North America. Many of the topics we discussed were further developed at the June, 2019 Assembly when Fr. Gittins worked with us.

It has been my hope and the hope of the Provincial Council that each conference be another step on the path to learning, as a community, how to intentionally live, pray and work together better, recognizing each other's diversity but also our shared Dehonian values. As with the 2018 and 2019 gatherings, and this 2020 conference, this is not an end, but a continuance, a work in progress, if you will.

Once again, this conference is a stepping stone toward planning for the future. We are closer but, still, there needs to be space for people to be individuals, always remembering that the community's needs and concerns ought to take priority over the individual's. This is the Dehonian way. It is my hope that, with the help of international Dehonians, we will, finally, begin a new ministry with young people, College Campus Ministry somewhere, anywhere in the United States.

This is the focus of this 2020 conference. Our ministry. Both where we are currently ministering and where we would like to go. We, the Council and I; but also all of us need to find the way and the will to make this happen, this year or next, we have to get this done. Let's get this done. Not rushing or hurrying, but methodically planning and preparing to make it happen.

During this conference, regarding ministry, your concerns need to and will be heard. I ask all of you to be present with an open heart and mind; I ask you not to prejudge the outcome of this conference. This is a very important time for us in the life of our Province; it is a critical time.

I and the Council are doing everything that we can to help prepare us for a healthy and positive future **together**, a future that will see us with a smaller and more international province. (In the last four years of my ministry as provincial, seventeen men have died.) That's a quarter of the province.

So now, I and the Council are asking each of you to continue to be a part of this planning together.

I thank Sr. Cathy Bertrand, SSND, for being with us once again as our conference facilitator. Cathy has been with us many times and knows us well. In reality, in many ways, she has become a part of us and is one with us.

I conclude with another comment from one of the evaluations: *“I do realize that this meeting is only the beginning. It is a process and it will take some doing from all members. My hope is that each member will look within oneself to do something that will enable change to take place. This experience was inspiring.”* (2018)

Let us pray to the Holy Spirit for guidance and wisdom and inspiration. We make this prayer through the intercession of Venerable Leo Dehon. Amen.

Thank you and again, **Welcome Brothers.**