

Spiritual Path for Dehonian Associates

Fifth Meeting

Prophets of Love, Servants of Reconciliation

Objectives

1. to maintain a sense of welcome and belonging among the participants
2. to realize that Dehonian Associates are called to be prophets of love and servants of reconciliation
3. to understand reparation as a welcome to the Spirit, as a response to Christ's love for us, as a communion in Christ's love for the Father, and as a cooperation in Christ's work of redemption in the midst of the world
4. to appreciate that the act of reparation is not only a prayer, but also an action, that is, making visible God's love in a broken world
5. to explore what the Dehonian Associates *Rule of Life* says about reparation and being prophets of love and servants of reconciliation
6. 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 and images suggesting a broken world in need of reconciliation [e.g. newspaper headlines and photos, articles downloaded from the Internet, begging letters from charitable organizations, announcements from local Peace and Justice organizations]. 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 [image of *The Prodigal Son and Father* on one side and the prayer on the reverse side] available for the participants.
5. Make sure someone can introduce and lead the sung mantra, "Make a Return of Love."
6. *Before the meeting*, ask one of the participants to prepare reading the witness of Fr Paul Tennyson, SCJ, 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 fifth 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.
 - ✓ In this sacred space, I invite you remember God's unconditional love for you.
 - ✓ Take a moment to notice how you respond to God's love for you.
 - ✓ Consider someone in your life who doesn't sense God's love for her/him.
 - ✓ How would you like to show God's love to this person?
 - ✓ Take a moment to be grateful for God's love. Then allow God to thank you for your willingness to witness to God's love.
 - ✓ 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 in unison:

**God, our loving Father,
you sent your Son among us as our brother.
He came to make your love as visible to our eyes
as the faces of our own family.
Illumined by the Heart of Jesus,
Leo John Dehon taught us to see,
in the rejection of your love,
the source of injustice and cruelty in our world.**

**Touch and illumine our hearts,
so that we might love as Jesus taught us.
May we identify with our brothers and sisters,
value the differences among us,
and collaborate with them
in healing the wounds that divide us.
In this way, may your grace be nurtured in the human family.
Amen.**

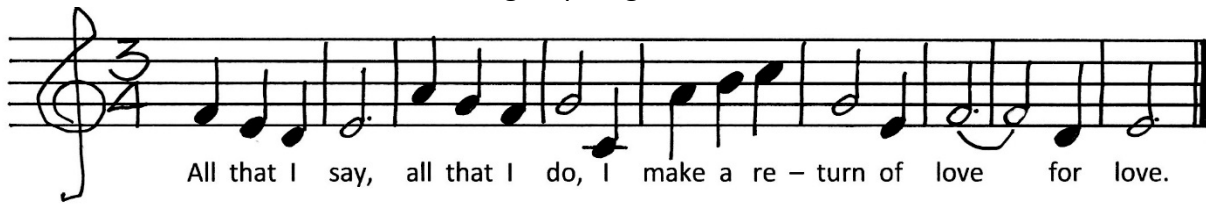
Review of Fourth Meeting

- Each participant shared what they consider to be their work or occupation and the difference it makes in the world.
- Jesus' actions over the bread and wine at the Last Supper—taking, blessing, breaking, and giving—are the same actions we perform in memory of him.
- The Eucharist is something we do, not only in church, but also in our daily lives.
- As Dehonian Associates, we strive to make of our lives “one never-ending Mass.”

Sharing

- Invite each participant to share their reflection upon these two questions:
 - ✓ How can you assist someone who needs to hear of God's love for her/him?
 - ✓ How can you contribute to reconciling a broken relationship or situation?

- After each individual shares, the group sings this mantra:



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Presentation: Prophets of Love, Servants of Reconciliation

In the Dehonian Associates *Rule of Life*, we read,

Those associated with Fr. Dehon ought to be prophets of love and servants of reconciliation of people and the world in Christ. Thus involved with Jesus to remedy sin and the lack of love in the Church and in the world, they shall render the worship of love and of reparation that his Heart desires through their whole life, their prayers, works, sufferings, and joys.

Rule of Life 7

What does it mean to be “prophets of love and servants of reconciliation”? For the Priests of the Sacred Heart, the answer has been gradually expanding over the years since they were founded by Fr. Leo John Dehon in 1877. We can hear the basic notion, in St. Paul’s Second Letter to the Corinthians:

If anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation...So we are ambassadors for Christ.

II Corinthians 5:17-20

Fr. Dehon became aware of his call to be an ambassador for Christ through the popular devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, particularly as St. Margaret Mary promoted it. When writing the Constitutions for his Congregation, he stated,

The purpose of the Priests of the Society of the Heart of Jesus is to promote the greater glory of God by a special devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, whom they will strive to console by repairing for the injuries inflicted upon him and by offering themselves to him as victims of his good pleasure in the spirit of reparation and love which is their distinctive character.

Dehon’s Circular Letter 44

They were also to promote the glory of God by their personal sanctification and by “zeal for the salvation of souls.” They would accomplish this through spiritual practices and their ministry.

Spiritual practices included offering Masses and Communion with the intention of making reparation, observance of First Fridays of the month and weekly Holy Hours, meditation on the sentiments of the Heart of Jesus, and making a daily morning offering. Their ministry included addressing any need as long as it allowed the possibility of living in community.

Referring to St. Margaret Mary's fourth and last vision, Dehon writes,

Showing his wounded Divine Heart, Our Lord said, "Behold the Heart which loves people so much and which receives nothing but coldness, neglect, and ingratitude from most people in return." What did he wish to obtain by this revelation of his Heart, if not hearts, love, and reparation? Has this desire of his Heart ceased? By no means. At the present time, and now more than ever, he seeks hearts by which he is really loved; hearts that console him by a life full of faith, generosity, fervor, and love; hearts that feel his sorrows, his sadness, and which seek to make amends in every way, even though it be necessary for them to sacrifice their honor, health, and life itself.

Spiritual Directory, p 19-20

Although it's pretty natural to hear this and to respond, saying, "Well, I can't do that," Fr. Dehon teaches us to do what we can and not compare ourselves to others. He writes,

Our Lord will not ask many remarkable deeds of us. We are small and feeble, but our good will, our tenderness, and our affection should console our Lord and compensate him for what we lack in strength and talents.

Spiritual Directory, p 23

Whatever we do only makes sense if we do it with love. Fr. Dehon explains,

In devotion to the Sacred Heart, reparation must be united to love. This reparation must be made especially by love which is formally opposed to ingratitude. The practice of reparation our Lord expects from us must therefore proceed from love, a love not satisfied with affection or feeling, but transforming itself into most generous acts of Christian virtue and into patience in trial. From the Heart of Jesus we shall draw this precious supplement of charity which alone can make our reparation pleasing to him.

The Love of the Sacred Heart III, 4th Mystery, 5th Meditation

Devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, as promoted by St. Margaret Mary, focused on personal sin and the need to return love for the love Jesus showed us in forgiving our personal sin. The proof of our grateful love for Jesus could be seen in not only our prayers, but also our actions, and our willingness to accept the sufferings that are a part of life and not avoid them. Fr. Dehon encourages us, saying,

Let us imitate [the woman who anointed Jesus' head at Bethany]; let us live in habitual sentiments of tender sadness at the remembrance of our sins, which made the good

Master suffer so much. Like [the woman who anointed Jesus' feet and dried them with her hair], let us love the Savior because he has forgiven us so much. To show him our love, let us every morning consecrate to him all our thoughts, our actions, and our sufferings of the day in a spirit of love and compassion. This habitual disposition must be renewed many times during the day by a moment of recollection, by a loving glance at the image of Jesus crucified. If we are faithful to these practices, all our actions will pour a perfume of love upon the feet and head of Jesus, as did [the women's] great act of love and reparation.

The Love of the Sacred Heart II, 2nd Mystery, 5th Meditation

When the Priests of the Sacred Heart rewrote their *Rule of Life*, following the directions of Vatican II, they used different language while trying to be faithful to the spirit of the original Constitutions that Fr. Dehon wrote over 135 years ago. This is what they wrote about reparation and this definition is found as well in the Dehonian Associates *Rule of Life*.

This is how we understand reparation: as a welcome to the Spirit, as a response to Christ's love for us, as a communion in his love for the Father, and as a cooperation in his work of redemption in the midst of the world. In our time, he frees people from sin and restores humanity in unity. He also calls us to live out a life of reparation which gives meaning to all that we do.

Dehonian Associates Rule of Life 22

This new definition of reparation includes a welcome, a response, a communion, and a cooperation. We **welcome** the Holy Spirit, who stirs within us, inflames our hearts, and inspires us to pay attention to the life around us—that which is abundant and that which is lacking in some way. Part of the abundant life is Christ's love for us. You know that when someone loves you deeply there is a natural **response** to want to return love for love. Our loving relationship with Christ brings us in **communion** with Christ's love for his Father—a love that is intimate, selfless, demanding, and infinite. Humanly speaking, we cannot love like that, but we can in communion with Jesus. We all know that our earthly life is always lacking in some way, whether from human limitation or the choice to sin. Jesus is at work in the world and our acts of reparation are a **cooperation** with him to bring to fulfillment his promise of abundant life.

Today, the Priests of the Sacred Heart understand reparation not only a response to personal sin, but also to social sin. What are the structures, systems, or assumptions in communities or governments that block the abundant life that Jesus promised? To name a few, we can consider the terrors of oppression, war, racism, human trafficking, consumerism, and ecological devastation. These are endured by the Body of Christ, and by extension, all God's creation. The work of reparation is concerned to replace a response of ingratitude or indifference with love toward the person of Jesus and to his Mystical Body.

An act of reparation is not only a prayer but also an activity. The activity of reparation can be understood as being prophets of love and servants of reconciliation. Like Jesus, we are to make God's love visible in the situations in which we find ourselves and in our larger world. Because we understand that a rejection of God's love is the ultimate source of injustice and cruelty in the world, we wish to proclaim God's love and model it.

In doing so, we are ambassadors for Christ and collaborate in his ministry of reconciliation. We are to love as Jesus taught us, to identify with our brothers and sisters, value the differences among us, and not let differences divide us. In collaborating with our brothers and sisters, in union with the love of Christ, we are servants of reconciliation who can begin to heal the wounds that divide our broken world.

This is a huge task, which we cannot accomplish on our own. God does not expect success as much as faithfulness. This is what Jesus modeled for us by embracing the cross. And, as prophets of love and servants of reconciliation, we keep our eye on the resurrection and the promise of abundant life for all of creation.

Break [10-15 minutes]

Personal Witness of Fr. Paul Tennyson, SCJ

Many of us grew up in a Church where daily prayer and Sunday Mass were viewed as obligations rather than as enthusiastic responses to God's love and care for us; a Church that told us that non-Catholics were unfortunate human beings who had no chance of getting into Heaven.

This included my own mother who was told by the priest on her wedding day, after he received her vows, that she was going to hell and was going to take this nice Catholic boy [my father] with her. As a result, many of us were left with an image of a stern, judgmental, punishing, exclusive God with little chance of being accepted into this Kingdom we dutifully pray for every day. There was little joy in life and even less hope and consolation in the practice of one's faith as most of us were doomed to purgatory.

For me a perfect example of this reality unfolded during my time as pastor at St. Mary's in Hagersville, Ontario [1998-2003]. The community had a small, regional hospital with a long-term geriatric unit on the top floor where I was a regular visitor. For about two years I would get emergency calls [always at night, of course] to visit a ninety-something year-old bachelor every two or three months who was always next to death. I would dutifully anoint him and then follow up the next day expecting to find that he had passed away only to find him enjoying breakfast or lunch.

Finally I thought enough is enough. I'm not going to keep doing this and so I said to him, "Joe, what's going on? I've anointed you at least eight times and here we are. You're probably going to outlive me!" And then it came out, those most heartbreaking words that I think a minister of the Gospel could possibly hear. Joe told me that he was afraid to die and God was going to punish him for all the things he had done wrong in his life. Seeing him suffer so was very upsetting and it took me a few minutes to regain my composure.

How sad to think that this kind and good man who had come to Canada from Ireland at a young age, worked hard all his life, and went faithfully to Church every Sunday for most of his adult life, could end up in such an emotional prison, afraid to die, convinced that God's Kingdom was beyond his reach. I wish Joe's story was unique to him but sadly we know that is not the case. Many of our brothers and sisters live with that same fear; convinced that God is going to get even with them. I've met many of them personally in and out of the Church.

What a different image of God Joe had than the one Jesus revealed to his followers. What a different image of God from the one that inspired and informed the life of Fr. Dehon, who saw in the Heart of Christ the perfect embodiment of God's unconditional love for each of his children. What a different notion of God than the one that called me to the SCJs.

Somehow, I knew that I had to offer Joe a different image of God. I shared with him the Gospel account of Jesus and the two thieves on the Cross, and the significance of this story for us. I asked Joe to think about what that story means for us. Here's Jesus, in agony and about to take his last breath. And yet what does he do at such a time? He gives hope and comfort to a man who has obviously wasted his life. Rather than condemn him, Jesus says to him, "Today, you will be with me in paradise."

"Joe, if Jesus is willing to extend God's mercy to this thief and invite him to the heavenly Kingdom, then surely that same mercy will be shown to you. Please know that God loves you and is not waiting for you to die in order to punish you. God is waiting for you to come home. Jesus makes it very clear that we have nothing to fear in life, not even death. Easter is our proof of that." I left the hospital feeling Joe was finally at peace. He died the next day.

- Provide a few moments of quiet to allow the participants to reflect on these words.

Reflection on Dehonian Associates Rule of Life

- Invite the participants to reflect upon selected numbers from the Dehonian Associates *Rule of Life*, which focuses on Reparation/Servants of Love and Prophets of Reconciliation. With each number, ask the participants to follow along in their personal copy of the *Rule*. The amount of time available and the level of response will suggest how many of these you can discuss. With each number, 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.

7. Those associated with Fr. Dehon ought to be prophets of love and servants of reconciliation of people and the world in Christ [cf. II Corinthians 5:18]. Thus involved with Jesus to remedy sin and the lack of love in the Church and in the world, they shall render the worship of love and of reparation that his Heart desires through their whole life, their prayers, works, sufferings, and joys.

22. This is how we understand reparation: as a welcome to the Spirit [cf. I Thessalonians 4:8], as a response to Christ's love for us, a communion in his love for the Father, and a cooperation in his work of redemption in the midst of the world. In our time, he frees people from sin and restores humanity in unity. He also calls us to live out a life of reparation which gives meaning to all that we do.

23. Thus, united with Christ, all our joys and sufferings share in the death and resurrection of Jesus for the redemption of the world. *Even now I find my joy in the sufferings I endure for you. In my own flesh I fill up what is lacking in the sufferings of Christ for the sake of his body, the Church* [Colossians 1:24].

24. Our love, motivating all that we are, what we do and suffer as we live the Gospel, heals humanity through our participation in Jesus' work of reconciliation, gathers it together in the Body of Christ, and consecrates it for the glory and joy of God.

Prayerful Celebration

- Begin by singing the mantra, “Make a Return of Love.”
- Reader One: **II Corinthians 5:17-20**
If anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation...So we are ambassadors for Christ.
- Sing mantra, “Make a Return of Love.”
- Reader Two: **Dehonian Associates Rule of Life #7**
Those associated with Fr. Dehon ought to be prophets of love and servants of reconciliation of people and the world in Christ. Thus involved with Jesus to remedy sin and the lack of love in the Church and in the world, they shall render the worship of love and of reparation that his Heart desires through their whole life, their prayers, works, sufferings, and joys.
- Sing mantra, “Make a Return of Love.”
- Reader Three: **Fr. Leo John Dehon** [*The Love of the Sacred Heart* III, 4th Mystery, 5th Meditation]
The practice of reparation our Lord expects from us must therefore proceed from love, a love not satisfied with affection or feeling, but transforming itself into most generous acts of Christian virtue and into patience in trial. From the Heart of Jesus we shall draw this precious supplement of charity which alone can make our reparation pleasing to him.
- Sing mantra, “Make a Return of Love.”
- 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, “Make a Return of Love.”
- Join hands and pray together the “Our Father.”
- Make any necessary announcements for the next meeting.
- Invite participants to take with them the prayer card. Remind them to bring the Dehonian Associates *Rule of Life* with them to the next scheduled meeting.