

# Spiritual Path for Dehonian Associates

## Sixth Meeting

### Union with Jesus Through Prayer and Work

#### Objectives

1. to maintain a sense of welcome and belonging among the participants
2. to understand that the “interior life” is a relationship with Jesus in which a person gradually comes to know, understand, and absorb within him or herself Jesus’ feelings and thoughts, Jesus’ words and actions, and Jesus’ unconditional love and compassion
3. to appreciate the various ways that a Dehonian Associate can practice union with Jesus
4. to realize that maintaining union with Jesus is a life-long spiritual task
5. to explore what the Dehonian Associates *Rule of Life* says about union with Jesus through prayer and work
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 a leafy plant [like a philodendron]. 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 Heart of Jesus 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, “Live in me.”
6. *Before the meeting*, ask one of the participants to prepare reading the witness of Fr. Vincent Suparman, 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 sixth 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 to imagine being in Nazareth, in the company of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph.
  - ✓ What do you notice about the Holy Family and how they go about their daily tasks?
  - ✓ What thoughts, feelings, or actions of the Holy Family would you like to make your own?
  - ✓ Take a moment to be grateful for the Holy Family's example. Then allow Jesus, Mary, and Joseph to thank you for spending a few moments thinking about them.
  - ✓ 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:

**Lord,  
give me the grace  
to see and read the interior of your pierced Heart.  
Intimate knowledge of your Heart  
will produce the response of love  
and the spirit of sacrifice in mine.  
Set my heart ablaze with the fire of your love  
that I may no longer think of anything but you,  
that I may live in you and for you,  
and that I take my delight  
in your good pleasure and your glory!  
Amen.**

Leo John Dehon, SCJ, 1893

## **Review of Fifth Meeting**

- Each participant shared how h/she tries to contribute to the reconciliation of a broken relationship or situation.
- Dehonians 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.
- Dehonians 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.

## Sharing

- Invite each participant to share their reflection upon these two questions:
  - ✓ What difference would it make if I could spent my day consciously in the presence of Jesus?
  - ✓ How do I come to know what God's will is for me?
- After each individual shares, the group sings this mantra:



Text: Cf. John 15: 4-5  
Tune: David F. Schimmel © 2015

## Presentation: Union with God Through Prayer and Work

Fr. Leo John Dehon often spoke about “the interior life.” He valued this interior life and in his personal diary often expressed the feeling that he did not practice it satisfactorily. The reason he gave was usually “being overcome with work.” It would be a mistake, however, to think that the interior life was something separate from his ministry or his ordinary, daily tasks.

What does Fr. Dehon mean by “the interior life”? In his *Spiritual Directory*, a guidebook for his Congregation, he writes that the proper character of the interior life of the Priests of the Sacred Heart is union with the Heart of Jesus [cf. *Spiritual Directory*, p. 221]. Jesus spoke about this union during the Last Supper.

“I am the vine,” Jesus told his disciples, “and you are the branches.” Jesus explains this image, saying, “Live in me as I do in you. No more than a branch can bear fruit of itself apart from the vine, can you bear fruit apart from me.” This intimate connection has a definite purpose. Remember, at the Last Supper, Jesus is leaving the world and entrusting his message of salvation with his disciples. “Those who live in me, and I in them,” Jesus says, “bear much fruit. And my Father is glorified in your bearing much fruit.” [John 15:4, 5, 8]

For Fr. Dehon, the interior life was the practice of being connected to the vine, who is Christ, and producing good works that continue to proclaim Jesus’ message of salvation. This is the Christian vocation. Fr. Dehon wrote,

Your destiny is to be united to our Lord in such an intimate and close way that, according to the word of his apostles you become other Christs.

The Life of Love, 30<sup>th</sup> Meditation, p. 206

This assumes a relationship with Jesus in which a person gradually comes to know, understand, and absorb within him or herself Jesus' feelings and thoughts, Jesus' words and actions, and Jesus' unconditional love and compassion. This is obviously a life-long process and for Fr. Dehon, "the essence of holiness" [Spiritual Directory, p 271].

Regarding this union, Fr. Dehon writes,

It is with our Lord's Heart and in his Heart that [the Priests of the Sacred Heart] should love, act, suffer, and sacrifice themselves. They should strive to live the life of this Divine Heart. It is the guide, the center, the hearth, and the repose of their life.

*Spiritual Directory*, pp 221-222

The Heart of Jesus may be a resting place, but it is never a hiding place. Jesus' concerns are our concerns; Jesus' ministry is our ministry. As the Dehonian Associates *Rule of Life* states,

Jesus calls us to active service in the Church. We want to be close to him, and we look for him wherever we find people healing and caring for one another. Jesus shared our joys and sorrows. He became one with the poor and lowly, and proclaimed God's love for them.

Dehonian Associates *Rule of Life* 27

### **How can we stay united to Jesus?**

Fr. Dehon teaches, sometimes by his example alone and sometimes by his words, the practices that will help us stay united to Jesus.

While still a seminarian, he noticed that the saints usually had a motto to encourage them and keep them focused on Jesus. Leo Dehon chose as a motto the question, "Lord, what would you have me do?" [Acts 22:10] He reasoned that if he was doing what God wanted him to do, he would be most pleasing to God. One way to stay united to Jesus is to ask in every situation, "Lord, what would you have me do?" and listen patiently until the answer is clear.

We will not be able to listen patiently if our lives are too busy and constantly filled with distractions. Our *Rule of Life* reminds us,

As Jesus loved to maintain union with the Father, we shall set aside times of silence and solitude to let ourselves be renewed in intimacy with Christ, and to unite ourselves with his love for people.

Dehonian Associates *Rule of Life* 57

Setting aside time for prayer is not as difficult as it may seem. People often make the mistake, however, of assuming that everyone will pray in exactly the same way. A factory worker will pray differently than a priest; a mother will pray differently than a religious Sister; and an elderly person will pray differently than a young person.

If it takes you a long time to wake up in the morning, don't expect to be alert while praying in the morning. If you are not a "night person," don't expect to stay awake while praying in the evening. Just because a book on prayer suggests a particular practice of prayer, this doesn't mean that it will be helpful to you. Pay attention to your circumstances and your bodily rhythms and create a prayer or a time of prayer uniquely your own.

Another unhelpful assumption is that "more is better." An hour of prayer is not necessarily more pleasing to God than five minutes of prayer. It is not the quantity of prayer that interests God, but the quality. When beginning something new, always start out small and gradually increase, as it seems best to you.

Ultimately, you want to create quality time to be in the presence of God. Reciting prayers can be helpful, but consider that God wants to hear you speaking from your heart. God also wants you to listen so as to hear God speaking from his Heart. And sometimes, just being silent in God's presence can be the most powerful prayer of all. So another way to stay united to Jesus is to make sure that prayer is a regular part of your life.

Because the Bible is the revealed Word of God, reading and thinking about a passage of Scripture is a specific way to listen to God speaking to our hearts. *Our Rule of Life* says,

We regularly listen to God's Word and reflect on Christ's love, revealed in the scriptures and in the lives of people. Thus we hope to receive a spirit of wisdom and revelation, in order to discover and truly know Christ the Lord, and the hope his call opens for us.  
*Dehonian Associates Rule of Life 55*

We listen to scripture each Sunday during Mass, but it would be beneficial if we read from the Bible more often. Once again, we do not have to spend a lot of time doing this, but a regular practice of listening and reflecting on God's Word is another way to stay united to Jesus.

Perhaps the most privileged form of maintaining union with Jesus is the celebration and reception of the Eucharist. In his diary, Fr. Dehon writes,

The love of our Lord would not have been content if it had only briefly been in contact with us while he was on earth. His union with us had been much too limited by time, space, and his way of being present. He wanted to be with us everywhere and always in

the mystery of the Eucharist and in the most intimate kind of union by becoming the nourishment of our souls.

*Daily Notes, March 24, 1868*

In this most intimate kind of union, we gradually become more and more like Christ. Our *Rule of Life* reminds us,

Eucharistic worship makes us attentive to the love and faithfulness of the Lord in his presence to our world. Sharing in his thanksgiving and intercession, we are called to serve by our whole life the Covenant of God with his people, and to work for unity among Christians and among all peoples. *Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake in the one bread* [1 Corinthians 10:17].

*Dehonian Associates Rule of Life 62*

Sharing in the Eucharist is an intimate way of staying united to Jesus.

From the very beginning, the Priests of the Sacred Heart practiced another form of uniting themselves to the Heart of Jesus that involves specific moments throughout the day. It may at first sound impractical for Dehonian Associates, but we can easily adapt this practice, which is an attempt to keep bringing us back into consciousness of being, thinking, speaking, and doing everything in union with the Heart of Jesus. Fr. Dehon taught,

Our Lord desires that his friends accustom themselves to think constantly of him without effort, to reach that permanent union which makes him live in their hearts and makes their hearts live in him.

*The Life of Love, 19<sup>th</sup> Meditation, p. 130*

Elsewhere, Fr. Dehon explains that this is not so difficult to achieve. By way of example, he says,

A scholar pursues an idea even in the midst of noise; a poet contemplates his favorite dream even in the most absorbing situations; a friend thinks of his absent friend; a son of his father; and a wife of her husband. To the friends of the Heart, Jesus wishes to be friend, father, and spouse.”

*Life of Love towards the Sacred Heart of Jesus, 29<sup>th</sup> Meditation*

Describing this practice, Fr. Dehon explains,

We shall make of our hearts a Nazareth in the morning, a Calvary in the afternoon, a Cenacle in the evening. Let us work in the presence of the Child Jesus in the morning, as did Mary and Joseph at Nazareth. In the afternoon let us remain on Calvary with Mary and St. John, and with Mary Magdalene. There we shall learn the value of the cross, the

great value of mortification and of trials. In the evening, with St. John, we shall repose on the Heart of Jesus in the Cenacle, and we shall pray with Jesus at Gethsemane.

*Spiritual Directory*, p. 273

The idea is to place ourselves, with Jesus, in those significant moments of his life and try our best to unite ourselves to what Jesus was feeling and thinking, to what he was saying and doing, and to the unconditional love and compassion that motivated every aspect of his life. There are other moments in Jesus' life which a person could choose to contemplate, but these three seemed important for Fr. Dehon because they clearly show Jesus' obedience to his Father's will.

Fr. Dehon explains a bit more about the significance of these three moments.

Nazareth, therefore, is a silent and hidden sanctuary where the Holy Family, those three Hearts so closely united, corresponding so perfectly to the divine Will in a poor and laborious life, a life of prayer, work and sacrifice, where this family thus cooperates with the work of redemption, and each according to his special vocation.

*Spiritual Directory*, p. 35

On Mount Calvary, let us consider Jesus' cross, his blood, his wounds, and his Heart pierced with a lance. There, we may also contemplate Mary, the Mother of Sorrows, St. John, the faithful and beloved disciple, Magdalene, and some holy women. Let us learn from these generous souls to have compassion for Jesus' sufferings, faithful and courageous love, and the spirit of reparation.

*Spiritual Directory*, p. 38-39

[In the evening] we unite ourselves with the agonizing savior.

*Spiritual Directory*, p. 162

How Jesus prayed at Gethsemane! What strength he found in prayer! The angel came to strengthen him; afterwards he is unsparing in his obedience and immolation.

*Daily Notes*, September retreat, 1905

For most of us, our days are spent in the same manner that Jesus spent his days at Nazareth. We quietly go about our work day-in and day-out. But would it make a difference to us if we consciously did our work, to the best of our ability, side-by-side with Jesus, and understood that we were making a contribution, however hidden, to his work of redemption?

Although less frequent, we all experience times of struggle, pain, fear of the unknown, and doubt. Would it make a difference to us at these times if we consciously united our tears with those of Jesus in Gethsemane, and side-by-side with Jesus placed our trust wholeheartedly in God, our Father, and decided to do our best in following not our will, but God's will?



Sometimes we are confronted with trials. God asks us to take up our own cross, or to accompany the trials of others. Would it make a difference to us if we consciously united our crosses with the cross of Jesus, and united the horrors of life with the agony of Jesus, so that with courageous love and generous compassion, we understood that abundant life flows from wounds, and that death is not the end of our story?

Reflecting on these moments in the life of Jesus and in our lives may not be a daily practice, but it is another powerful way to unite ourselves with the Heart of Jesus, not only responding as Jesus did, but also doing it with great love.

### **How will I know that I'm united to Jesus?**

When we try to be united to the Heart of Jesus, it's natural for us to wonder if we are succeeding. Occasionally, Fr. Dehon shared what he experienced. He wrote,

In union with the Heart of Jesus I shall find an inexhaustible source of zeal and strength.  
*Crowns of Love I, 4<sup>th</sup> Mystery, 1<sup>st</sup> Meditation, p 96*

If we are united to the Heart of Jesus, we ought always to find in this union a depth of sweet joy that will continue through our sufferings.  
*Crowns of Love 1, 5<sup>th</sup> Mystery, 1<sup>st</sup> Meditation, p 118*

It is an experience made a thousand times: union with Jesus alone can give me joy and peace.  
*Daily Notes, 1887*

To maintain union with Jesus was the lifetime spiritual goal of Leo John Dehon. Devotion to the Heart of Jesus encouraged him to be one with the thoughts and feelings and the words and actions of Jesus so that he would know how to live and love as Jesus does. Fr. Dehon, whose religious name was *John of the Heart of Jesus*, still serves as a practical model for the entire Dehonian Family. All who identify themselves as "of the Heart of Jesus" will seek that union expressed in the final invocation of the Litany of the Sacred Heart. "Jesus, meek and humble of heart, make our hearts like your Heart."

**Break** [10-15 minutes]

**Personal Witness: Fr. Vincent Suparman, SCJ**, ministers among Native Americans on the plains of South Dakota.

In terms of spiritual growth, which is the goal of every human being and of those who are being reshaped by the Holy Spirit, I am often inspired by farmers, especially here in South Dakota. If

the crop doesn't grow, the farmer is concerned about what's wrong. Experts study the crops in the fields and run tests. When a Christian stops growing, spiritual help is needed. One of the missionary activities is to grow spiritually in order to meet the spiritual needs of the people I serve.

Having been in religious life for 26 years, I still have to learn constantly about spiritual and pastoral aspects that in turn will broaden my perspective of thinking and develop my pastoral ministry in the future. Instead of letting my energy be absorbed by any activity around me, I let myself be enlightened by the Holy Spirit so that I will be able to see clearly what I have been doing in the mission field.

Reflecting on mission activities on the prairie, I come to realize that I am called to serve people with an open heart and mind. At the same time, I need to strengthen my inner spirit and keep my life on track. When trials come, there is no better way to endure them but by praying patiently and attentively in the presence of God. A simple prayer helps us, not only to deepen our spiritual life, but also to stay connected with God, other people, and other creatures around us.

To be aware of God's presence is one of the few valuable efforts that cannot be neglected regarding spiritual growth. In my opinion, no one can stray from God and remain healthy. Through the celebration of the Eucharist and adoration of the Eucharist, our life is nourished and transformed into a better quality of life. In turn, community life becomes stronger and healthier. As a result, community life bears abundantly fruit that is revealed through our life and ministry.

- 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 maintaining union with Christ. 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.

**16.** As did Fr. Dehon, we want to make union with Christ in his love for the Father and for people the principle and center of our life. With special love we meditate on these words of

the Lord: *Live in me, as I do in you. No more than a branch can bear fruit of itself apart from the vine, can you bear fruit apart from me* [John 15:4]. Faithful to hearing the Word and sharing the Bread, we are invited to discover more and more the person of Jesus and the mystery of his Heart, and to proclaim his love which surpasses all understanding.

**26.** Jesus calls us to active service in the Church. We want to be close to him, and we look for him wherever we find people healing and caring for one another. Jesus shared our joys and sorrows. He became one with the poor and lowly, and proclaimed God's love for them. *I assure you, as often as you did it for one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me* [Matthew 25:40].

**55.** We regularly listen to God's Word and reflect on Christ's love, revealed in the scriptures and in the lives of people. Thus we hope to receive a spirit of wisdom and revelation, in order to discover and truly know Christ the Lord, and the hope his call opens for us.

**57.** As Jesus loved to maintain union with the Father, we shall set aside times of silence and solitude to let ourselves be renewed in intimacy with Christ, and to unite ourselves with his love for people.

**62.** Eucharistic worship makes us attentive to the love and faithfulness of the Lord in his presence to our world. Sharing in his thanksgiving and intercession, we are called to serve by our whole life the Covenant of God with his people, and to work for unity among Christians and among all peoples. *Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake in the one bread* [I Corinthians 10:17].

## Prayerful Celebration

- Begin by singing the mantra, “Live in Me.”
- Reader One: **John 15:4, 5, 8**  
I am the vine, and you are the branches. Live in me as I do in you. No more than a branch can bear fruit of itself apart from the vine, can you bear fruit apart from me. Those who live in me, and I in them, bear much fruit. And my Father is glorified in your bearing much fruit.”
- Sing mantra, “Live in Me.”
- Reader Two: **Dehonian Associates Rule of Life #57**  
As Jesus loved to maintain union with the Father, we shall set aside times of silence and solitude to let ourselves be renewed in intimacy with Christ, and to unite ourselves with his love for people.
- Sing mantra, “Live in Me.”
- Reader Three: **Fr. Leo John Dehon** [*Daily Notes*, 1887]  
It is an experience, made a thousand times: union with Jesus alone can give me joy and peace.
- Sing mantra, “Live in Me.”
- 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, “Live in Me.”
- 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.