

Spiritual Path for Dehonian Associates

Second Meeting

Oblation: A Daily Offering of Self to God in Order to Advance the Reign of the Heart of Jesus in Souls and Society

Objectives

1. to maintain a sense of welcome among the participants
2. to come to a basic understanding of the meaning of oblation and a life of oblation
3. to honor each participant's capacity to live a life of oblation in the midst of his/her specific circumstances
4. to explore what the Dehonian Associates *Rule of Life* says about uniting one's whole life to the oblation of Christ
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 the Heart of Jesus, and enough copies of the *Dehonian Associates Prayer Book* for each participant to receive one. 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 cross on one side and the prayer on the reverse side], and of Dehon's meditation, "The Life of Oblation to the Sacred Heart of Jesus" available for the participants.
5. Make sure someone can introduce and lead the sung mantra, "Here I am, Lord."
6. *Before the meeting*, ask one of the participants to prepare the reading about Silvia Bertozzi 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, the dynamic of the group will suggest the most appropriate time.

Welcome

A greeting and a welcome back, preferably from an SCJ, to all those who attending the second 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.*
 - ✓ 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.*
 - ✓ 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.
 - ✓ Call to mind someone whom you love more than anyone else. It's okay if the person is now deceased. Place yourself in the presence of this person. What do you notice about this person? How do you feel?
 - ✓ Imagine that this person needs something from you or asks you to do something. How do you respond? Imagine that this request will be very difficult for you to accomplish. How do you respond?
 - ✓ Imagine fulfilling your loved one's request. What do you experience? What do you feel?
 - ✓ Take a moment to thank God for the gift of this person whom you love more than anyone else. Then allow God to thank you for your willingness to do whatever you can to show your love for this person.
 - ✓ Gently bring your awareness back to this circle.
- When you are ready, open your eyes. When everyone has opened his/her eyes, turn off the music.

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

**I renounce my own glory
and from now on
I wish to live only for the glory of God.
Everything that I have I consecrate to God:
my body, soul, and intelligence,
my feelings and will,
all my material possessions and relationships.**

**From now on,
I must use everything solely for God's glory
and for the joy of the angels and saints.
Therefore, I want to live in Jesus:
in his presence and in his love.
I want to live through him,
through his grace and inspiration.
I want to live for him,
for his glory and his reign.
Amen.**

Review of Introductory Meeting

- Each person shared what attracts him/her to the spirituality of the Priests of the Sacred Heart.
- Dehonian Associates are part of an International Dehonian Family
- Dehonian Associates are individuals or groups who share the faith experience and charism of Fr. Dehon, according to each one's circumstances in life.

Sharing

- Invite each participant to share their reflection upon two questions:
 - ✓ What is the best way for you to know what God's will is for your life?
 - ✓ Share an example of a time when you tried your best to understand and do God's will.
- After each individual shares, the group sings this mantra:

Refrain



Here I am, Lord, here I am. I come to do your will.

Text: Psalm 40, Music: Rory Cooney, © 1971, 1991, NALR

Presentation: Oblation

As we begin exploring the spirituality of Fr. Leo John Dehon, it is important to understand the foundation of his approach to life. The response to his experience of God's love, revealed in the Sacred Heart of Jesus, was the total and loving gift of himself to God and to God's people. Fr. Dehon used different words to talk about this gift of self and some of these terms sound a bit frightening. At first glance, this spiritual approach is frightening, but it is more accurate to say that it is challenging. Fr. Dehon does not deny this, but insists that every person can practice it in his or her own way.

Immolation In religious language, the word "immolation" refers to a sacrifice offered to God that is totally consumed by fire. An example would be the animal sacrifices which ancient peoples offered to God as part of their worship. Fr. Dehon uses this term to suggest that in responding to God's love, there can be no half-measures. In giving our entire selves to God, he explains, "Our profession of immolation may practically be reduced to this formula: to pray, to act, to suffer, and to sacrifice self for the Sacred Heart."

Victim A favorite term for Fr. Dehon, but a much more difficult sounding word for us is "victim." In a religious sense, a victim is a living creature slain and offered in sacrifice during a religious rite. For Dehon, it has the same sense as "immolation." It is a difficult term for us because we understand the word to refer to an individual who suffers the consequences of human cruelty, as in "victims of war."

In fact, Fr. Dehon used the word "victim" in both a negative and positive sense. In his social writings, he deplores the sad state of affairs brought on by the French Revolution and the Industrial Revolution. He acknowledges victims of an inadequate educational system, victims of accident, illness, or layoffs, and factory workers who are victims of injustice.

In his spiritual writings, however, Fr. Dehon holds up Jesus, "the victim of Calvary," as an antidote to all these social problems, and from whose example people can "lessen sorrow, prevent conflicts, and resolve the most burning issues of the day."

In following Jesus, the Divine Victim, who became human to redeem us from the oppression of sin and restore God's glory in creation, Fr. Dehon wanted to be a victim for the victims. In union with Jesus, he wanted to build God's reign on earth. Fr. Dehon did not see himself as a victim of circumstances, but rather as a victim of love and as a realistic model for Christians, who wish to cooperate with the designs of God. As Fr. Dehon taught, "The victim of the Sacred Heart should sacrifice himself by love in the flames of the Divine Heart. Jesus consummated his sacrifice in the love of his Heart, especially by his agony and on the cross."

Oblation The word, “oblation” comes from the Latin word meaning, “to offer.” The original name of the Priests of the Sacred Heart of Jesus was “Oblates of the Sacred Heart of Jesus.” Fr. Dehon clearly intended his community of men to immolate their lives as victims of love. In the *Dehonian Associates Rule of Life* we read, “As Dehonian Associates, we share in Fr. Dehon’s gift. We are called in the Church to live, above all, a life of union with the oblation of Christ” [#25]. “We consecrate ourselves to the Sacred Heart of Jesus in order to unite our whole life with the oblation of Christ. He helps us love in the spirit of the beatitudes. Our effort to live this way is a witness for others and a never ending task” [#33].

Ecce venio It is important for us to note that Fr. Dehon did not want to be a victim or an oblate on his own, but in union with Christ. And to be totally united to Christ, Fr. Dehon wanted to integrate within himself the attitude of Jesus, or the motivation behind his work of redeeming a sinful humanity. Fr. Dehon found a summary of Jesus’ attitude in the Book of Hebrews [10:5-7], which meditates on the moment Christ came into the world, saying, “Behold I come, O God, to do your will.” Fr. Dehon always used the Latin phrase, *Ecce venio*, to recall this entire verse from Hebrews.

He writes, “Our whole vocation, our purpose, our duties, our promises are found in these words. 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, to sacrifice whatever you ask of me.” He adds, “It does not suffice to carry the cross outwardly and from necessity; it is necessary to embrace it with love, to carry it with joy and courage, to desire it with ardor as the greatest and most certain treasure.”

Ecce ancilla Fr. Dehon saw this same attitude reflected in Mary’s response to the angel Gabriel, “Behold the servant of the Lord, let it be done to me according to your word” [Luke 1:38]. Once again, Dehon used the Latin phrase, *Ecce ancilla*, to recall Mary’s entire response. Fr. Dehon writes, “The *Ecce ancilla* sums up the life of Mary as the *Ecce venio* sums up the life of Jesus. These words of Mary were like a formula of profession, of her vow of victim; and only after these words was the Word made flesh. By her *Ecce ancilla*, by her consent, Mary accepted the invitation to become the Mother of the Redeemer. She accepted not only the honor and dignity of this maternity, but also the sufferings and sacrifices attached to it. She declared that she was ready to fulfill the will of God in everything, to be his handmaid. This is what constitutes a victim.”

Fiat One more Latin word was often spoken by Fr. Dehon to reconfirm his commitment to be a victim or an oblate, totally at the service of God’s will, particularly when it seemed like a heavy cross. The Latin word, *fiat*, meaning, “let it be done,” comes from Mary’s wholehearted response to the angel Gabriel. In his retreat notes, Fr. Dehon prays, “Lord, give me the grace to

be completely docile to all that you will, and to the events that reveal it to me. May the disposition of my heart be a perpetual fiat and an unshakable peace!”

A Practical Spirituality Describing the spiritual attitude necessary for the life of victims, Fr. Dehon summarizes, “To will only what God wills; to entrust themselves entirely to him without delay, without reserve for time and for eternity; to be ready for everything; to give themselves up and to accept all with love as willed or permitted by God. This is a sacrifice agreeable to the Sacred Heart of Jesus.”

“What God wills.” We might talk about obeying God’s will or following God’s plan. Whatever words we use, this is essentially the spirituality of the Priests of the Sacred Heart: to respond to God’s love by thinking and feeling like Jesus, who chose to be totally faithful to God’s will. Fr. Dehon described his community members as those who “have a heart to love, a body to suffer, and a will to sacrifice. They should practice absolute indifference and the acceptance with love of all that Providence brings.”

At first hearing, this might seem like a spirituality that is beyond your reach, but consider your own experience. Think of your sick child, your spouse’s depression, your dear friend’s struggle with alcohol, watching your mother lose her memory to Alzheimer’s, adapting your lifestyle after a downsizing, marching for civil rights, helping a person live with AIDS, defending the rights of immigrants, or advocating for affordable housing.

Because you love this person or group of people, you are willing to sacrifice and spend yourself, no matter what it takes. Instinctively, you know God’s will for you in these difficult situations. You may wish the difficulty to pass, but if it doesn’t, you are willing to face it. This is what Fr. Dehon means when he writes, “All can and should be practical victims by docility in following grace, by fidelity in fulfilling one’s duties, and by generosity in offering the sacrifice.”

Daily Act of Oblation Discerning, accepting, and being completely available to accomplish God’s will is so central for Fr. Dehon and members of the Dehonian Family that they find ways to remind themselves of it often. Principally, they do this through a morning offering, called an act of oblation. Fr. Dehon suggests making a “continual oblation” by repeating frequently, particularly before major activities of the day, a short form of the act of oblation in order to develop a habit of thinking and feeling as Jesus does.

Fr. Dehon advises, “the practical way of renewing this oblation can be limited to a simple and rapid offering made from the heart. Above all, one should not feel so constrained by this resolution as to keep one’s spirit tense with effort all day long...In working for our Lord everything should be done as simply and as candidly as possible.”

At the conclusion of our meeting today, each of you will receive the *Dehonian Associates Prayer Book*, in order to assist you in living a life of oblation. Among the many prayers included in this

book, there are 12 oblation prayers. There are also samples of brief prayers that you can use to renew your act of oblation throughout the day.

- Questions/comments

Break [10-15 minutes]

Personal Witness of Silvia Bertozzi, A Consecrated Virgin from Italy and member of the International Organizing Committee for the Dehonian Family

Life-threatening complications from a badly injured knee set Silvia Bertozzi on a path toward her vocation as a consecrated virgin living the Dehonian charism. 33 years old and in an intensive physical therapy program near Bologna, Italy, she said, “I realized that I needed to mend more than my body, I needed to mend my heart and my faith.”

As Silvia struggled to regain her physical health through three months of grueling therapy, her faith began to heal with the help of an SCJ priest who became her spiritual director. “My devotion to the Sacred Heart was rediscovered and grew during my convalescence, shaped more and more by the Dehonian charism,” she confirmed.

“I made a private promise to God that if I could walk again I would serve in the Dehonian mission in Mozambique.” The inspiration for the missions came from both her physical therapist, who volunteered in Africa, and her SCJ spiritual director, who had been a missionary in Mozambique.

Once Silvia was able to walk again she contacted her employer, who agreed to give her a year’s sabbatical. She spent much of it in Mozambique, teaching electronics, English, and computer science at a vocational school operated by the SCJs.

On Sundays, she accompanied SCJs on their visits to remote mission stations. “During this time I learned to give without expecting thanks in return, to respect without imposing my culture and my views on others. Those days helped me to mature as a person as well as confirm me in the decision to offer my entire life to God.”

When Silvia returned to Bologna, she talked to her spiritual director about the experience. “I told him of my desire to consecrate my life to God, to live the Dehonian charism,” she said. “I wanted to live in the full charism, without dilution. It was the Dehonian charism that swept me away and set my spiritual life afire.”

Both her spiritual director and her bishop suggested that she become a consecrated virgin.

“What attracted me was the fact that I could choose to live according to any spiritual charism approved by the Church,” she said. “Since I already embraced Dehonian spirituality, I could continue and thrive in it.” Silvia’s consecration was on the Feast of the Sacred Heart, May 30, 2005.

Today, Silvia lives in Finland and works for Noika. Outside of her full-time job, she has a hectic ministry schedule that includes sacramental preparations for children and teens, adult catechesis, lay Dehonian formation, and a variety of other pastoral activities. “I read whatever is available on the spiritual works of Fr. Dehon,” she said, “but most of what I learn about the Dehonian charism comes from sharing my life with the Dehonians.”

Reflecting on her life since those first days at the rehabilitation center, Silvia says, “The past ten years have been amazing! The love of God has shaped me and Jesus’ Heart propels me to dare to be more and more of what he calls me to be. Each day I reply with *Ecce Venio* and *Ecce Ancilla*. My vocation as a consecrated virgin is fueled by that love. Tender and compassionate, it encompasses me. Truly, Fr Dehon has left us the most precious of treasures.”

- 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 focus on oblation. 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.

40 Jesus gave himself in love to the will of the Father. He was attentive and open to the needs and expectations of people. *My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to complete his work* [John 4:34]. Our consecration unites with Jesus as we offer ourselves to God and seek to do his saving will.

41 We strive to be attentive to what the Spirit suggests to us through the Word of God received in the Church and through the events of life. Thus in a world searching for freedom, we want to witness to the true freedom Christ has gained for us, which is only reached by saying “yes” to the Father.

44 Our consecration shows how we are to live an apostolic life. It points to the presence of Christ and the coming reign of God. Our sense of community is strengthened by our service in the parish and neighborhood. Not afraid of change, we join and support sincere efforts at reconciliation and communal regard.

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.

[Additional references to **Oblation** in the Dehonian Associates *Rule of Life* include #6, 25, 33, 34, 42, 52, 54, 59, and 72]

Prayerful Celebration

- Begin by singing the mantra, “Here I am, Lord.”
- Reader One: **Hebrews 10:5-7**
When Christ came into the world, he said, “Sacrifices and offerings you have not desired, but a body you have prepared for me; in burnt offerings and sin offerings you have taken no pleasure. Then I said, ‘Behold, I have come to do your will, O God.’”
- Sing mantra, “Here I am, Lord.”
- Reader Two: **Dehonian Associates Rule of Life #34**
Christ gave himself entirely to the Father and to people in a love without reserve. By our consecration, we promise to follow Christ faithfully in his love for God and for every person, and in his way of being present to people. This fidelity frees our heart and opens us both to the Holy Spirit and to our neighbor. In this way we form true communities where we can all grow fully and where a new family, founded on the spiritual power of love, can take root.
- Sing mantra, “Here I am, Lord.”
- Reader Three: **Fr. Leo John Dehon** [from *The Life of Love towards the Sacred Heart of Jesus*, 22nd Meditation]
“If you sincerely desire to love God with your whole heart, begin by giving yourself entirely to him, in order that he may make of you and perform in you everything that will please him.”
- Sing mantra, “Here I am, Lord.”
- 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, “Here I am, Lord.”
- One by one, invite each participant to receive the *Dehonian Associates Prayer Book*, using these or similar words: “As you consider walking the Dehonian Spiritual Path, may this *Prayer Book* inspire you, comfort you, challenge you, and unite you with all the members of the Dehonian Family.”
- At the conclusion of this ritual, sing once more the mantra, “Here I am, Lord.”
- Join hands and pray together the “Our Father.”
- Make any necessary announcements for the next meeting.
- Invite participants to take with them, in addition to the *Dehonian Associates Prayer Book* and the prayer card, a copy of the meditation, “The Life of Oblation to the Sacred

Heart of Jesus,” written by Fr. Dehon. Encourage them to make use of these until the next scheduled meeting. Remind them to bring the Dehonian Associates *Rule of Life* with them when you next meet.