



SCJ News

A newsletter of the U.S. Province of the Priests of the Sacred Heart (Dehonians)



Ministry amid the COVID-19 pandemic

PHOTO: Br. Andy Gancarczyk, SCJ

Covered in a mask decorated with an image of Our Lady of Guadalupe, Fr. Tim Gray, SCJ, blesses parishioners in their vehicles at OLG in Houston.

The pandemic — COVID-19 — has had an impact on just about every corner of not only the US Province, but the entire worldwide congregation of the Priests of the Sacred Heart. “Sint Unum” [that all may be one] has long been a Dehonian motto. Although the virus has affected each area in different ways, we — all peoples, all nations, all faiths — are one in that we are ALL impacted by it.

In the US Province, schools and parishes physically closed but quickly made the transition to online education and ministry. Thirty-one students at Sacred Heart Seminary and School

of Theology were able to complete their studies and earn their degrees in May, though as was the case with many other graduates around the country, they were not able to take part in a traditional graduation ceremony.

Our parishes livestreamed liturgies, getting websites and cameras set up in time for Holy Week and Easter. The novitiate team of Fr. Byron Haaland, SCJ, and Fr. Andrzej Sudol, SCJ, got creative when they realized they wouldn’t be able to find palms for Palm Sunday. The novices waved pine branches as they sang their hosannas.

At the time of this writing, some parishes have begun to open their doors to on-site Masses, mindful of the restrictions set by each diocese and government authorities.

Offices throughout the province are trying to maintain services with fewer on-site staff. In some cases, people are working at home, while those who need to be on-site are staggering their shifts so that only a limited number are present at once. Zoom, Skype and other teleconference systems have been vital tools for meetings, including the annual two-day budget meeting of the Provincial Council in early May.

Of course, not everything can be done virtually. The Jubilee Celebration planned for June 8 has been postponed until September 18, and the June 9-12 Provincial Assembly was cancelled.

During the past two months we invited SCJs, co-workers and others with whom Dehonians collaborate to reflect on the impact of COVID-19 on themselves, their ministries and/or their communities. The full list of reflections can be accessed from the "CORONAVIRUS" link in the red bar at the top of the US Province website (www.dehoniansusa.org). The following are excerpts from several of the reflections.

Fr. Ed Kilianski, SCJ Provincial Superior of the US Province

I find myself, as most of us do, living in a time of uncertainty and fear and I am thinking of my religious community, my family and friends.

COVID-19 has certainly changed our lives and, I believe, how many of us perceive the new world in which we live. It certainly hasn't been easy for any of us. This "Staying at Home" and "Social Distancing" is challenging.

It seems to me that in this global pandemic of COVID-19, God has mysteriously asked us for this sacrifice so that ultimately it may bring us closer to Him. And in our willingness to put it all on the line, this time will be partially spent being in need of others' help at a socially acceptable distance. We may grow weaker so that Christ can grow stronger. When given the chance, let us be truly appreciative of those on the front lines of the pandemic: doctors, nurses, medical



Fr. Ed

staff of all kinds.

I think, in trying to make sense out of this experience, I realize that it's all tied up with *Fiat* and *Ecce Venio*.

Today, this is my prayer for you: that you trust deeply in the mercy of our loving Father, just as Jesus did. I know that this is difficult; we are human, and we are afraid. But we are in this together, as one Dehonian family, one people of God.

Fr. Guy Blair, SCJ Ministry to the deaf; chaplain at the State Mental Hospital, San Antonio

I caught a glimpse of her, or rather I glimpsed someone wrapped in a blanket in an alleyway near the Dollar Store. An old woman surrounded by the usual shopping cart filled with her belongings, sad. Back at my apartment, I considered her, perhaps 70 years old, homeless in the "greatest" country in the world.

It wasn't an easy action for an introvert like me to do, but it began with the realization that this old woman might be someone's mother; really, she was my sister. I made a meal and walked to the store. She was there and I offered her the meal.

"Is there anything I can help you with?" I asked. Surprisingly she responded, "I got everything I need here."

I got everything I need here. Really? My face reddened at the embarrassment of myself and my inflated needs.

Despite whatever her issues are and what may have led an old woman into homelessness, she has not complained about social distancing, about deprivations because the stores are closed or that there are no beauty salons to get her hair done. She has not complained about feelings of discon-



Fr. Guy

nection. The COVID-19 virus, the disruption to social life and all the other situations that we find ourselves in, she has already experienced them and more. Her demeanor, her responses, are not based on complaints connected to the lack of comforts in her life. She has intimacy with pain, she seems to have accepted suffering as her companion.

Fr. Vien Nguyen, SCJ Assistant professor, SHSST

In this unprecedented time, faculty at SHSST are thrust into the new world of remote teaching/distance learning on very short notice. For some of us, it is a massive undertaking to develop interactive online courses from scratch in a short time. Charged with the instruction to utilize available institutional resources to convert all in-person classes to virtual settings, we venture into this academic cyberspace with a spirit of adaptability and collaboration.

In my short two years at SHSST, I have never taught online courses or undergone formal training in online teaching. Since I am trained in and am more comfortable with the traditional, in-person classes, I am interested in learning from other professors and remote-learning educators for tips to help develop a creative and effective online pedagogy. This means coming up with instructional strategies that encourage active participation, develop fruitful academic habits, and foster theological reflections.

Many suggest that we stay connected with students individually so that they may express their concerns and that we may learn how best to meet their learning needs. Several advocate flexibility. Some propose sim-



Fr. Vien



Fr. Rafael communicates with parishioners in the parking lot

plicity: do less. A few recommend that we create compassionate learning environments, giving attention to the uncertainty, stress, and anxiety that our seminarians and students may experience. This is the recommendation that I will take to heart as we move forward. The hope is that compassion will lead to trust and understanding.

Fr. Rafael Querobin, SCJ
Associate pastor
Our Lady of Guadalupe, Houston

It is strange to look at the closed church, the school without students, and the empty office. Since March 15, my steps have been limited to a triangle between the rectory, the office, and the church. The Masses that we broadcast on Sundays have been a way of keeping in touch with our parishioners and with people from all over the world. We are surprised by the number of people who have followed our broadcasts.

I have faced this time of detachment as if I were living in the novitiate again. I consider my novitiate to be a unique and special time. Of course, the circumstances are dif-

ferent and the concerns are many at the moment. I have tried to live a personal routine of prayer, reading, language studies, and physical activities (inside my room).

After this time has passed, we will have an enormous mission waiting for us. I am sure that we will need to be with people and accompany their needs. I believe that the most important thing for us right now is to live one day at a time and do what we always said we didn't have time for.

Note: Our Lady of Guadalupe began offering on-site liturgies at the beginning of May. However, as of this writing, most parishioners continued to attend Mass via livestream.

Fr. Albertus Joni, SCJ
Doctoral student from Indonesia

There is no better moment to reflect the on meaning of suffering than Holy Week. While I approached the sacred Easter season, I realized that both globalization and capitalism – two common “highways” toward a prosperous society – cannot properly solve our problems.

This COVID-19 outbreak challenges me to see the other side of the coin. This pandemic shows us that the modern world desperately needs what Jesus has revealed to us all: solidarity. Through the cross, Jesus entered into full solidarity with the suffering of the world, with the vulnerability of being human. As Jesus went into the mystery of human death, He showed us that we — the disciples — also need to enter into the suffering of our neighbors.

While our society is heavily marked with social injustice and an

ever-widening gap between the haves and the have-nots, we, Christians, are called to show the world that our brothers and sisters are more than calculations, predictions, and numbers. Christians see their neighbor not only as an autonomous human being with rights and fundamental equality but as the living image of God the Father, redeemed by the blood of Jesus Christ and placed under the permanent action of the Holy Spirit.

This is why self-isolation is NOT a reason NOT to act, to witness this truth. We can start simply by showing friendly gestures or encouragement in helping others in need.

I am proud of so many Dehonians who turn to social media platforms and broadcast their Masses and Eucharistic Adorations. They keep spreading the message of love and solidarity for the people in need of hope and encouragement. Every act of solidarity celebrates the love of God to humanity, and vice versa. It becomes an instrument of communion with God! Yes, this is a difficult time for everyone — yet, I do believe that this is also the moment to share the best of us and of what we believe in.



Fr. Joni

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 Priests of the Sacred Heart



Fr. Juancho

Fr. Juan Carlos Castañeda Rojas, SCJ Currently ministering in Colombia

I see an awakening in many priests – priests and religious women who are finding new and creative ways to “get out of the sacristies” by using social media and other forms of communication. The celebration of the Mass, Adoration, praying the rosary, and even catechesis is being done online. They are reaching out to their parishioners when the people need it the most and I see how important it is for people to feel that even when the Church is physically closed, they still have a connection to it and God; they still belong to their home parish.

Today, as this pandemic affects the entire world, most people are not physically in the church buildings. But it is clear that the Church lives in the hearts of people. Processions and other celebrations were silenced, but today we can hear people praying the rosary louder, praying from the balconies or the windows of their homes. People who hadn't gone to Mass regularly are starting to do so online.

Today we may be locked in the sacristy, but that is just a physical space. The REAL sacristy is in our hearts. It is not easy for me to be at home knowing that many people need us today more than ever; it is not easy for many of us to be away from our ministries.

Mike Tyrell President, St. Joseph's Indian School

I am consoled knowing that God does not give us more than what we can handle. One only has to look at the life and writings of Fr. Dehon. He speaks of the concept of abandonment, not from a place of uncertainty, but out of a spirit of “placing one's plans in the hand of a loving God and accepting successes and set-backs, joys and disappointments, mistakes and triumphs.” It is this concept of surrender that I've found myself hanging on to through this period. It is part of a Dehonian Spirit that inspires us in this time of need.

I am bolstered in the knowledge that the organization [St. Joseph's Indian School] will survive this based on two ideas. First, we are a blessed organization with an important mission. I truly believe this. That mission has played out with a history that includes great resilience and consistency. That foundation has helped carry us through to where and who we are today.

Second, we have survived some very difficult periods over the years. The challenges during the Great Depression should have closed the school: fire, drought, plagues of insects, etc. In the 1990s we survived a period of insolvency that would have ruined other organizations. In the 2000s there was the anthrax scare and the financial meltdown of 2008. We survived all of those large struggles



Mike Tyrell

and many smaller ones, so now we are here to fight through these challenging times. May God bless our students, their families, our supporters, our staff and the SCJs. Stay safe.

Br. Duane Lemke, SCJ Superior of Sacred Heart Monastery; pastoral associate at St. Martin of Tours in Franklin, WI

Peace in peaceful times is easy. Knowing peace in times of anxiety — that is the difficult part. Yet, ever since those anxious disciples gathered in the Upper Room, Christ has offered peace through the experience of his risen and living Body.

I have seen many attempts to find God in the pandemic. Some seek peace through faith in a God of protection. I certainly know that impulse to ask God to protect loved ones, the vulnerable, and, of course, myself. Yet if the Gospel, pastoral experience, and life have taught me anything, it is that God's faithful are not immune from suffering. If anything, the cross and suffering seem to be a guarantee of Christian life.

Let us open our eyes to signs of love all around us and offer thanksgiving for those who make God's love



In the midst of the coronavirus shut-down members of the Sacred Heart Monastery Community decided to nurture a bit of new life on the Sacred Heart Seminary and School of Theology grounds by planting trees. Pictured here are Fr. Ardianto Hendrik, Fr. Jean-Claude Mbassi and Br. Duane Lemke.

present in suffering. Let us take a break from anxious headlines, the endless frantic posts and notifications of social media, and make space for prayer.

Celsus Robert Postulant; student at Sacred Heart Seminary and School of Theology

This epidemic hit us at a time when the Church was calling us into solidarity with each other during Lent. It was a time for deeper self-reflection and sacrifice; therefore, for me it was an easy transition into being creative and making the best out of this crisis. Some of us started a novena to the Divine Heart and then moved into more devotions and personal prayers, including Stations of the Cross.

The transition to online classes went fine for me, although the case-load became heavier with more online posting and discussions. I was able to utilize Zoom for most of my classes, and with this, I was still able to interact with my fellow classmates. I've had more free time to do things which I have been putting on hold. I tended to my little nursery in my room and out in the hallway, I spend more time praying and reading, and most of all I spend more time catching up on calls and emails which I had for too long not returned.

Overall, this Stay-at-Home order and transition to online education has been a productive time for me. I am able to spend more time with my fellow brothers in community. I spend more time using the indoor fitness center as well as playing indoor soccer with members of the community. Some of us even started cooking more often and inviting others to partake. Therefore, there have been benefits to this time, including a



Celsus Robert

closer bond with God and with others around me.

Frater Long Nguyen, SCJ Mississippi community

God did not promise us that our faith journey would be easy, therefore he calls us often to seek strength through the Eucharist.

The daily news helps us keep up with the current situation but we should not allow the daily news to carry us away from our focus on Jesus. At the moment, we have family members or friends who may be ill. There are people who have died. This time of our lives scares us. This pandemic illness may lead us to better or worse days.

However, when our slumber has passed, our life in God will continue. Before we jump to a conclusion, Jesus had already established that he has power over illness in other parables of the Bible.

Jesus grants us some power over illness as well. He gives us the encouragement and ability to care for ourselves, to enjoy our current health, to connect with a network of support from friends and family etc...

How do we continue to live in the world in light of the Resurrection of Jesus? How do we live in light of this widespread illness? Jesus declares that he is the light of the world and uses the contrast between light and dark to illustrate an example. Jesus continues to call us to follow him, the light, so we might not stumble in the dark. He has provided the faithful many examples of being a healer and a servant through other passages of the Bible. Jesus also shows us to be loving, courageous, tenacious and diligent despite many challenges and hardships on our faith journey.



Frater Long

Frater Kodjovi Hubert Liassidji, SCJ Seminararian, Sacred Heart Seminary and School of Theology

When I started the semester in January, I never thought that it would get to be harder and more difficult as it did. After my spring break, everything was turned upside down. Adjustments were made due the pandemic of COVID-19. In-person classes moved to online learning. It was a learning method that I was not used to and was often hard for me.

First, there was time management. All of my classes required a lot of time and intensive work; I had to learn how to properly make time for all of them. Self-motivation was also difficult. At first, I didn't have any motivation for online learning. But with the encouragement, the help and the support of my brothers, I have come to understand that I need a positive attitude and a sense of determination to overcome these challenges. I am grateful that the lockdown affects neither my prayer life nor my community life.

This time of lockdown reminds me that I can do a lot of good from a distance. That is, without being present I can still offer help and generosity. Besides holding in my heart those who need my prayers, I can share happiness with people far away just with a phone call, a letter or an email to check on them and to let them know that they are in my prayers. Of course, one of my prayers is that this pandemic comes to an end soon so that we can begin to work toward more of a sense of "normal."



Frater Hubert carries the formation community's "Sint Unum" sign.



Fr. Quang celebrating Mass at SHML

Fr. Quang Nguyen, SCJ **Vice provincial superior;** **vocation director**

Around this time 45 years ago, the news informed Americans that their involvement in Vietnam was officially coming to a close. But for us – the approximately 20 million people of South Vietnam – it was not simply “the news.” It was our lives, lives that were negatively changed forever. Amidst the sound of artillery explosions and chaotic atmosphere, many unanswerable questions were posed. Would there be a massacre? How would we be treated by the victors? What would our lives look like in the coming days?

I could see terrifying fear and fright in the eyes of my parents and neighbors. In short, my parents seemed to have lost all control over their lives and the lives of those entrusted to them. This uncertain future paralyzed the strong will of many. There was a choice that we had to make: move forward in faith, directly confronting whatever challenges or hardships that might come our way, or allow fear to stop us from living.

Our lives definitely changed. Vietnam is no longer our home. One thing that did not change – even in the most horrific moments – was our faith in God. Perhaps faith was the only motivation that propelled us forward. We trusted that all things would be well, and we surrendered our “control” to God because amidst

so many evils, there were good people, events, and circumstances that allowed us to see with the eyes of faith the goodness and mercy of God in our lives. We could experience God’s presence at every turn.

Today, in the midst of the pandemic, I see the same terrifying fear and anxiety in the eyes of so many people. The unseen virus forces us to contemplate unanswerable questions just as my family did 45 years ago in Vietnam. What will our lives look like in the future? How will it be different? What will the “new normal” look like? How can we avoid being infected by this deadly virus?

As Christians, and specifically, as members of the Priests of the Sacred Heart, we are called to go forth and bring the good news of God to others. Perhaps this is a perfect moment for each of us to demonstrate that we are people of faith and we are witnesses God’s love and mercy through the way we live our lives.

Fr. Stephan Huffstetter, SCJ **General Councilor in Rome**

Rome is a much different city than I have ever experienced. First, we noticed the lack of tourists and crowds. Before Lent, I went to St. Peter’s Basilica to go to confession. The usual wait is about 45 minutes to an hour. I walked up to the security line with only three people ahead of me. Inside, only a few people were scattered about the massive church. Instead of a throng ten deep by Michelangelo’s Pieta, there was one small group. I walked up to the altar area and enjoyed the sculpture, statues, and art nearly in silence and with much tranquility. So prayerful!

Our community chapel now has



The meeting hall in Rome, site of international meetings and General Chapters, remains empty.

a two per pew limit, and in the refectory [dining room] tables built for eight to ten have a maximum seating limit of four.

[When Fr. Steve returned to Rome from international travel he had to eat in a separate dining room for two weeks with only one other member of the community.]

The members of our kitchen staff are still able to come to work, but we now have strict orders to stay out of the kitchen completely, not even to help bring in the dirty dishes.

Like most hotels in Rome, our Villa Aurelia is closed due to all the cancellations. Most of the area restaurants are not franchises, but family owned and many are worried that the shut-down will ruin them.

Fr. Stefan, the director of the Center for Dehonian Studies, has faithfully gone into the historic city center one night a week for several years with the community of San Egidio, offering a sandwich and conversation to the senza-tetto (without a roof, or homeless) of the city. During the epidemic they are some of the most vulnerable of the population. While he must take extra precautions, like wearing a mask, he offers this needed service.

None of us knows how long this will last, or what lasting changes it will bring to our world. That doesn’t change our basic charism but calls us in a deeper way to seek out God’s will each day, and respond with love and a spirit of oblation.



Fr. Steve

A friend to the homeless and disadvantaged in Houston

Fr. Frank Wittouck, SCJ, is retiring from his ministry as chaplain to Magnificat Houses, a faith-based, multifaceted organization that provides shelter, meals and other support to the homeless, hungry and mentally ill in Houston. The following is from a feature done on him in the Winter 2020 edition of the organization's newsletter, *The Magnifier* (editor: Casey Kelly), and is reprinted with permission:

When MHI's beloved chaplain announced his upcoming retirement, faces fell all around campus. Fr. Frank Wittouck, SCJ, has spent the last ten years serving the spiritual and the temporal needs of our residential community —

and with a delightful flair! With one knowing glance, Fr. Frank brings humor to self-discovery as he counsels residents (and often staff) through rough patches. He revels in "the pure joy of living with the poor." He enjoys "hanging out" with his immediate neighbors in our prison release programs. He brings great depth to our jobs program, coaching residents in resume writing and interviewing, celebrating their triumphs and helping them move past disappointments. He has been known to phone Jesus!

Fr. Frank's wisdom was hard-won, from a tough Chicago upbringing to military chaplaincy during Desert Storm. As an only child in an alcoholic household, young Frank had a deep yearning for siblings to share his world. At age 14, he "ran away" to the seminary and gained

120 brothers overnight — and never looked back!

He was ordained in 1965 and for 15 years found his calling in educating, training and coaching seminarians. The next 20 years, he served as a US Army chaplain in active duty assignments in Korea, Honduras, Panama, Germany, Iraq and Kuwait. After military retirement he began service as a pastor in Texas.

Providence — and Magnificat Houses founder Rose Mary Badami — brought Fr. Frank to our door in 2010. She needed a priest to celebrate a single Mass and called around as far away as Cypress. Fr. Frank kindly volunteered, albeit he had never heard of

Magnificat Houses, 25 miles away. Though he lost the address along the way and started Mass late, he and Rose Mary quickly bonded and he became entranced with the community. Soon he moved



Fr. Frank visits with a client at Magnificat Houses

in as chaplain and was again living with 120 brothers (and even sisters this time)!

Fr. Frank will have many brothers again at his religious community's home base in Wisconsin. For his big move, Fr. Frank — noting our glaring need — bought himself a refrigerated box truck to donate back to MHI. That was just like him.

Fr. Frank's contributions to us all are lasting and legion.

Fr. Frank is scheduled to move to Sacred Heart Monastery soon after this issue of the SCJ News goes in the mail.



St. Joseph's Indian School named top-rated nonprofit

St. Joseph's Indian School was named as a "2020 Top-Rated Nonprofit" by GreatNonprofits, the leading provider of user reviews of charities and nonprofits.

"We are honored to receive a Top-Rated Charity award for the fourth consecutive year from GreatNonprofits," said Mike Tyrell, president of the school.

The Top-Rated Nonprofit Award is based on the rating and number of reviews that St. Joseph's Indian School received from volunteers, donors and aid recipients. The GreatNonprofits Top-Rated Awards are the only awards for nonprofits determined by those with direct experience with the charities as donors, volunteers and recipients of aid.

Music for social distancing

During the final weeks of the semester, Dr. Benjamin Stone, Director of Music and Organist at Sacred Heart Seminary and School of Theology, posted musical pieces, along with background information on them, for daily listening. Featured composers included Johann Sebastian Bach, Girolamo Frescobaldi, Matthias Weckmann, Dan Locklair and Georg Böhm.

Go to www.shsst.edu/music-for-social-distancing/ to access the music.

“A gentle man filled with compassion”

*Remembering
Fr. Frank Burshnick, SCJ
1937-2020*

Fr. Frank Burshnick, SCJ, died February 21 in Pinellas Park, FL. He was 82, professed for 53 years and ordained 49.

On May 1, he would have celebrated his 50th anniversary of priesthood.

Originally from Forest City, PA, he initially taught for five years at Immaculate Heart of Mary Seminary before entering parish ministry. In Texas, he served at Our Lady of Guadalupe in Brownsville, OLG in Raymondville, St. Cecilia in San Antonio, and Prince of Peace in Lyford.



Fr. Frank

During his years in the Rio Grande Valley he often assisted at a refugee center established by the bishop of Brownsville. A child of immigrants (his parents were

Slovenian), Fr. Frank grew up in a small town filled with fellow immigrant families, many of whom came from Eastern Europe to work in the local coal mines. He said that it gave him a sense of compassion for the needs of modern-day immigrants.

In 1984, Fr. Frank moved to Mississippi, where he ministered at the parishes of Sacred Heart in Walls and Christ the King in Southaven. In 2007 Fr. Frank retired and joined the Sacred Heart Community in Pinellas Park, FL, where he died just after getting ready to leave the house to celebrate Mass.

“A man of faith, love and patience” is how Fr. Jim Walters, SCJ, remembered Fr. Frank during the vigil at Sacred Heart at Monastery Lake.

“Always welcoming,” said Fr. Ed Kilianski, SCJ. “A gentle man filled with compassion for others,” added Fr. Richard MacDonald, SCJ.



Patty, a cousin of Fr. Frank, remembers going to his ordination when she was just 10 years old



DEHONIANS Priests of the Sacred Heart

Our ministries are diverse, as are our members. Yet our goal is the same: to work with a common heart in service to God’s people, reflecting the love of Christ as experienced by our founder,
Fr. Leo John Dehon

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us in community
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