



# Dehonians USA

PRIESTS OF THE SACRED HEART

February 2, 2022

Feast of the Presentation of the Lord

My dear brothers,

As I thought about what I would write in my first letter to you as provincial superior, I decided that I would put it in the context of a letter to our Founder, Father Leo John Dehon. So here it goes:

Dear Fr. Dehon,

After more than two years of not gathering at the provincial level because of the coronavirus pandemic, it was time for us to come together for the Election Assembly in Hales Corners, January 3-6, and rekindle within us the fire of love as Priests of the Sacred Heart. At our assembly, we shared our hopes and dreams for the next three years. We expressed our desire for spiritual renewal, sustainability, internationality, and intercultural living. We listened to each other and then elected a new administration to lead the province. My brothers elected us—Jack Kurps, Rafael Querobin, Gregory Schill, Duane Lemke, David Nagel, and me.

In case you haven't noticed, I am an immigrant from Vietnam, a country once colonized by people from your homeland. As you know, the US Province was founded and led by immigrants—SCJs from Europe. Ninety-nine years since their arrival, another immigrant is leading the province, beginning today, February 2, 2022, the Feast of the Presentation of the Lord and World Day for Consecrated Life. Although Vietnamese by birth, I am quite American and intercultural. Although I am the third youngest provincial superior in the history of the US Province, early life experiences have shaped my willpower, self-discipline, and perseverance. I cheated death to come to the United States and lived in refugee camps with scarcity. All is grace.

Fr. Dehon, as founder and superior general of the congregation, you know the joys and challenges of leadership ministry. You went through the pains of the *Consummation Est*. At a General Chapter, some delegates did not want you as superior general. You

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fought to keep the young congregation from bishops' hands, which allowed it to flourish and grow beyond France.

What kept you grounded and hopeful? I am sure that you turned to the Sacred Heart, the fountain of your love and hope and of your spiritual and ministerial life. I know that your attitude must have been one of trust and fiat and of *ecce venio* and *ecce ancilla*. Following your example, I want to ground myself in Sacred Heart spirituality. Concretely, I will continue to assist the Centro Studi Dehoniani with the digitization of old issues of *Dehoniana*. Proofreading articles in English for typographical errors has helped me appreciate much more our Sacred Heart spirituality and the charism you handed to us, as well as our history and mission, both locally and globally. I have had the opportunity to get to know you more intimately. In my provincialate office, there will be a portrait of you looking over my shoulder, as if you are telling us to face the future with unwavering faith (see portrait attached).

My brothers are committed to God, the Church, the Congregation, and to the people of God. Although they are aware of the challenges of our times, they still talked eagerly and excitedly at our assembly about spreading SCJ spirituality and the charism in collaboration with the laity, as you did when you organized social justice-related meetings and congresses to highlight the plight of the poor and the rights of workers. Fr Dehon, what would you do if you were in my position? What advice would you give the council and me? While awaiting your correspondence, the council and I will meet in the next few months to process what we heard from our brothers and discern our vision for the province. We will create a vision map for the next three years, focusing on three areas: spirituality, community, and ministry.

- **Spirituality.** The year 2023 marks the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the SCJs' presence in the United States. I envision ongoing spiritual renewal programs, retreats, and conferences throughout my term. A committee will be formed to prepare us for the anniversary and spiritual renewal. As for the Dehon Study Center, until we have a director for the center, I expect to utilize a team model in which Dehon scholars work collaboratively to help foster SCJ spirituality and the charism among our members and co-workers. On a rotating basis, each would contribute an article or reflection for use in our province communications or in a series of electronic mailings (e-blasts) that will be part of our preparation for the Centennial Anniversary.

- **Community.** I will continue to value and respect our elders, as well as engage and – I hope – inspire younger members. In community life, differences can be a source of difficulty. With more international SCJs participating in our mission in the US, intentional intercultural living will continue to be a challenge, and so learning how to do it better as a religious community will continue to be a priority. I will visit our communities frequently and challenge my brothers to see cultural differences as a gift and to embrace the spirit of *Cor Unum*.
- **Ministry.** We strive to carry on our mission. We will continue to ask for help from other entities in the congregation. SCJs from other entities will undergo a structured preparation process to familiarize themselves with US church history, ministerial sensibility, and religious practices proper to our culture. While at the same time, those of us already a part of the US Province will continue to better learn how to welcome the traditions and gifts of these fellow SCJ brothers, Dehonians just as ourselves. As we reflect on ministry, we must also remember that our sustainability will depend on the involvement of the laity.

By April 2022, we will have a concrete plan to present to the province members for discussion and input. Fr. Dehon, we welcome you to share your thoughts. We will listen for your voice in prayer as we discern the path that you envision for the future of your congregation.

Although you were not with us in person at our assembly, your spirit was. Your name came up often in our prayers and conversations. When the day comes for me to see you, I want to thank you for inspiring us to love God, the Church, the Congregation, and the people of God through devotion to the Sacred Heart. As provincial, I will work with the council to tend the fire of love for the Sacred Heart you started.

Your son,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Vien', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Vien V. Nguyen, SCJ  
US Provincial Superior



This photo of Fr. Dehon was digitally restored by Charles Brown, SCJ, with the assistance of a photo editor.