



Dehonians USA

PRIESTS OF THE SACRED HEART

March 30, 2022

“Some people think they are in community, but they are only in proximity. True community requires commitment and openness. It is a willingness to extend yourself to encounter and know the other.” - David Spangler

Dear Brothers,

We are two weeks away from Triduum. On Good Friday, we meditate on the Lord’s passion and death. The Gospels tell us that Jesus’ arrest and crucifixion turned the disciples’ lives upside down. What did they do in this moment of uncertainty and existential crisis? Certainly, the disciples were confused and afraid. But they also gathered in a safe place, a locked room, as community to make sense of this overwhelming reality. Their time together as community sustained them and carried them through all the risks and difficulties that they faced. Early Christians too recognized the importance of community in their spiritual quest and devoted themselves to communal life. The Acts of Apostles recounts that the believers met daily to hear the apostles’ teaching, break bread, and dedicate themselves to good works (Acts 2:42-47).

From the apostolic community in Jerusalem to contemporary forms of religious life, community life has always been a significant aspect of a religious’ spiritual and consecrated life. It is where we help each other get closer to God, foster mutual respect, and collaborate on our mission. In a 2020 survey conducted by the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA), nine in ten new entrants to religious life (or 93% of the total respondents) indicated that community life “somewhat” or “very much” attracted them to their particular religious institute. Foundational to our particular community life as brother SCJs is our prayer in common, especially the celebration of the Eucharist.

If community life is an attracting factor for a person’s call and discernment to religious life, we are challenged to ask ourselves about our own commitment to

community life. How committed are we to fraternal life lived in community? What contributions have we made to build up community? How can we make our communities centers of Gospel life? Our SCJ Constitutions stresses that our community life is an expression of ecclesial communion and a special witness of love among God's people: "Within the Church we are called to follow Christ, and in the world to be witnesses and servants of the communion of people in a fraternal community" (Cst. 59).

As we all know, community life brings the best and, at times, the not-so-best out of us. Mindful of God's unconditional love for us, our Cst. 66 asks us to accept one another with charity and respect. However, it also reminds us of the prospect of being challenged by our brothers. The dynamic of each community evolves according to its members and requires each person's ongoing conversion of heart with guidance by the Spirit. We are called to continually be open to both challenging and receiving challenges from our brothers, mindful that "challenge" in our life as Dehonians is a two-way street, but a path that must always be based in love.

The focus of my 2022 Provincial Visitation is community life. Attached is a brief reflection from *Beyond the Crossroads: Religious Life in the 21st Century* by Amy Hereford, CSJ. I invite you to read it and use this text as a starting point to reflect on conversion and commitment to community life. I pray that when young SCJs and prospective candidates visit our communities that they will be inspired by how we live our fraternal life in community.

The Provincial Council will meet at St. Joseph's Indian School on April 5-6 to discern where the Spirit is calling and leading us. One of the pillars the council will reflect on and discuss is community life. We ask for your prayers.

Your brother,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be "V. J. J. J." with a stylized flourish at the end.

The excerpt is taken from *Beyond the Crossroads: Religious Life in the 21st Century* by Amy Hereford, CSJ, pp. 94-95.

CONVERSION—Unquestionably the most essential part of any Christian community is the commitment of each person to live the gospel and to grow in a personal commitment to *metanoia*. This is the work and the gift of a lifetime, and we in religious life share the journey with others who are moving in the same direction.

MATURITY—Along with growing spirituality, we make a commitment to live as adults in community. Sure, things get crazy. Sure, we make mistakes. Sure, we have to navigate what it all means. And, in the midst of this, each of us should be striving to live as mature people, taking responsibility for our own lives and wellbeing while supporting others in community.

ACCEPTANCE AND RESPECT—The first two elements focused inward; this one focuses outward. I must love and respect other person in my community. I must believe in his or her journey of conversion and maturity, and I must support that journey. This is not a Pollyanna belief, but a jumble acknowledgment that we all struggle. I must cut others the slack I would have them cut to me. I must give them the space to grow and change.

RESPONSIBILITY—Everyone in the community has responsibility for the community. Every one of us can make the community better or worse by our participation. In the best of communities, everyone wants to contribute because he or she believes others are giving as well.

COMMITMENT—This is the glue that binds us together. I can count on your commitment, you can count on mine. Commitment is respectful and realistic, and it knows when to go the extra mile for a sister or brother who needs us. Differences will arise, conflicts will come. If we all have the commitment to make community work, we can get through almost anything. This is presuming, of course, that the previous elements are also in place.

CONVERSION—I have to put this at the last, as well. I always have to come back to my personal commitment to God, community, and mission. I must rely on God's creative love that brought me this far to continue to re-create that divine spirit within me and within my community.