



# Dehonians USA

PRIESTS OF THE SACRED HEART

October 17, 2022

Dear Brothers,

*Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, until the end of the age (Mt 28:19-20).*

The Gospel of Matthew ends with the commissioning of the disciples as witnesses of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection. Coupled with the authority given to them to expel unclean spirits and cure diseases and illnesses, the commission reflects the disciples' readiness and Jesus' trust in them (Mt 10:1-2). The disciples' lives and identities were intertwined with Christ's. St. Paul makes explicit the point in his confession in the letter to the Galatians that he had been crucified with Christ and that he no longer lived for himself but for Christ (2:20).

As Dehonians, our lives are not only integrally tied with Christ but also with our Founder whose spirituality and mission we strive to live and share. But what is so distinctive about our Dehonian spirituality? What differentiates us from other religious communities? These questions were alluded to during the meeting of SCJs in parochial ministry on September 7, 2022, when discussing Dehonian identity and presence. Participants were asked to reflect on how parishioners know that we are Dehonians and what differentiates us from the diocesan-administered parish. Would parishioners know that the Priests of the Sacred Heart administer their parishes? And what are we doing or have been doing to promote our Dehonian identity and presence?

Questions about identity and presence in our parishes are not something new. They have been on the minds of SCJs throughout the Congregation for years. In 2008, Dehonian pastors gathered in Manila to reflect and share their parochial, ministerial experiences. In the letter Richard MacDonald helped craft, the participants highlighted some of the benchmarks of an SCJ parish. They include living our spirituality, promoting a robust Eucharistic prayer life, knowing the people's reality, empowering the laity, working for justice and peace, and caring for creation. These are "getting out of the sacristy" invitations to encounter God in the world. The participants acknowledged that carrying out these hopes and dreams requires ongoing conversion and commitment.

In addition to the abovementioned benchmarks, participants of the meeting for SCJs in parochial ministry voiced the desire to be intentional and explicit in incorporating Dehonian spirituality in homilies, celebrate Dehonian traditions (e.g., First Fridays and Adoration), and make Dehonian crosses and signs (e.g., “staffed by the Priests of the Sacred Heart”) visible in our parishes. There were also references to inviting parishioners for Eucharistic adoration and morning prayer and inserting information about Fr. Dehon, Dehonian spirituality, and the US Province in our parish bulletins and websites.

Underlining these benchmarks and activities is the essence of lived Dehonian spirituality and human relationships. While serving at Our Lady of Guadalupe Parish in Houston as a deacon and in my first year of priestly ministry, I often heard people share memorable stories of SCJs who had touched their lives. They asked about the well-being of SCJs whom they knew and respected. They valued our presence in their lives—in all circumstances of life. Perhaps, these memories help people keep their faith and carry on the mission of their Master. On our social media—in particular, Facebook—people often leave touching tributes to SCJs who have inspired and changed their lives.

“Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations.” “Get out of the sacristy.” We are commissioned! Our mission begins with a consciousness of our intertwined identity with the crucified Christ and our Dehonian spirituality of the Heart centered on God’s boundless and passionate love for humanity.

No matter what our ministry, be it parochial, in an educational setting, administrative or even internal ministry among our brothers, may our way of life and daily actions be bolder than any logo or text in stating to others, “This is an SCJ, this is a Dehonian.”

Fraternally,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "V. [unclear]". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial letter.