



# Dehonians USA

PRIESTS OF THE SACRED HEART

November 10, 2022

Dear Brothers,

Among the many people who played a vital role in the missionary life of the early church were Aquila and Priscilla. Their partnership as a husband-and-wife team helped each other evangelize for Christ. In the gendered specifics of the Greco-Roman world where men and women were separated in public and some private spaces, the partnership would enable Aquila to evangelize to the men and Priscilla to the women. I will return to this point later.

Fr. Dehon recognized the power of partnership to advance Catholic social teaching in 19<sup>th</sup>-century France and challenge people to live responsibly and justly. And collaboration is crucial in our province. We have SCJs from other entities serving in our apostolates. More than 500 religious and laypeople minister alongside us. This is the outcome of the visions and dreams of many SCJs, past and present. And many of our ministries wouldn't be possible without the partnership with our benefactors.

For many years, women religious from various communities have partnered with us. For example, Sacred Heart School in Mississippi celebrated its 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary this year. Its success is primarily made possible by the dedication of many, especially the School Sisters of St. Francis. In South Dakota, women religious from different communities have served alongside our SCJs to catechize the young and accompany adults. Many people in Lower Brule and Crow Creek reservations—especially women—speak fondly of the sisters.

The presence of women religious in Lower Brule has been absent since 2016. Presently, only one sister is serving out of Ft. Thompson. The pastoral team has been aware of the need for more sisters. With dialogue and support of the Lower Brule Ministries team, the time has come for the Provincial Council to welcome religious sisters back to Lower Brule.

In early October, I traveled to the Philippines to invite a diocesan women's religious community to join us in ministry in South Dakota. With the help of Fr. Lukas Hadi Siswo Sasmito, SCJ, regional superior, I was introduced to the archbishop of Cagayan de Oro and the leadership of the Theresian Missionaries of Mary (TMM). Some of the TMM sisters work with the SCJs in the Philippines.

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The TMM, founded in 1985, is a small diocesan religious community with under 20 sisters. Its charism: “Giving glory to God by offering themselves as His little instruments in healing His church wounded by sin and unfaithfulness through prayer, penance, and evangelization.” The sisters’ ministry centers mostly on education and finance in parishes.



In my meetings with the archbishop, the TMM leadership, and all the sisters, I stressed the challenge of the ministry in South Dakota and the need to send spiritually and emotionally strong individuals with a missionary spirit. They are willing to send two sisters with a strong background in education and finance. Both have taught and are on their leadership team. One is a musician. And one works in the SCJ fundraising office. It is hoped that, like Priscilla, these two sisters can help us minister to the women on the reservation who are increasingly taking on crucial roles in holding the family together. Women ministering to women!

The next steps involve contractual agreement, visa sponsorship, and ministry preparation. These were discussed at the council meeting on November 9, 2022. If all goes as planned, the two sisters are expected to take ministry preparatory courses both before their assignments and when they arrive in South Dakota. Courses they can take include the Lakota language, the history of the Native Americans, Native American spirituality, and inculturation.

Per Fr. Jack Kurps’ request, I am also working with Fr. Lukas and the archbishop of Cagayan de Oro to partner with another group of sisters for ministry in Mississippi.

Partnership requires an openness to dialogue and regular evaluation. I intend to keep a healthy line of communication open with our partners to address any concerns that might arise. I welcome your suggestions to ensure the success of our partnerships with religious women from overseas and SCJs from other entities. I ask for your prayers as we endeavor to explore new partnerships.

Fraternally,