



March 1, 2023

Dear Brothers,

At the January Pre-Chapter virtual meeting, several delegates mentioned the need to discuss the Dehonian charism and spirituality through the lens of social justice. The point raised prompted me to reflect on the question: What is social justice?

The term is variously defined and interpreted. Some equate it to restoring people's wholeness and dignity through direct or indirect service for the economically poor and those on the peripheries. Others interpret it as legislative advocacy, such as using our voice and influence to effect social change in institutions and political structures to ensure that all peoples have equal rights and opportunities. Regardless if social justice is philosophically, theologically, sociologically, or politically defined, the core principle is the call and commitment to safeguarding the inherent dignity of the human person and the sacredness of life grounded in divine love.



My reflection on the question led me to the *Parable of the Persistent Widow* (or *the Parable of the Unjust Judge*) in Luke 18. The reader is told that there is a judge in a certain town who neither fears God nor respects people. A widow in that town comes to him asking for a just decision against an adversary. For a long time, the judge is unwilling but eventually gives in because she persistently bothers him.

The traditional interpretation has often portrayed the widow as weak, dependent, and needy. But was she? Let me share how I view her. A closer study of the verb *hypōpiazō* sheds new light. This verb is often translated as “to wear out,” “to bother,” or “to pester.” But such a translation doesn't capture the meaning of the verb and softens the woman's tenacity for justice. *Hypōpiazō* is a boxing term that means “to give a black eye” or “to hit under the eye.” Reading in this light, the widow is a dominant character ready to make things happen—to challenge the patriarchal system that oppressed her and the people who enabled the oppressive system. For her, enough is enough. She comes to him for the last time with a vengeance, and the

judge finally acts because he fears getting a “blow in the face” from this woman. The act would inflict significant reputational damage to the judge in the manly Greco-Roman world, for a man should not let anyone physically violate his body.

If the widow—a victim of injustice—is tenacious in her pursuit of justice, I couldn’t stop pondering: Who are the agents of social justice today? What are our roles as Dehonians?

On my trip to Indonesia, I wanted to know how our Dehonian brothers engage in social justice. For years, the Indonesian Province has been proactively engaged in education, which Fr. Dehon recognized as a channel to promote social justice and effect social change. Moreover, Dehonians parishes are centers of social engagement where people can receive medical care and counseling. Human trafficking and immigration are two societal concerns that our brothers are working on addressing.

I hope our provincial chapter in July is one of many occasions in which we reflect on our Dehonian charism and spirituality through the lens of social justice.

Fraternally,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be the name "Vice". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.