



# Dehonians USA

PRIESTS OF THE SACRED HEART

August 30, 2023

Dear Brothers,

In early August 2023, the major superiors and councilors of men's religious communities gathered in Kansas City for the annual national assembly. The theme for this year was "We Are the Body of Christ: Charism and Community." Over 200 men attended. Representing the US Province were Jack Kurps, Rafael Querobin, Greg Schill, and me. The organizing team utilized different formats, from panel discussions to small and large group discussions, to explore and engage leaders on the topics of charism and community, interculturality and intergenerationality. It was truly an enriching experience that prompted me to take a moment to briefly reflect on the meaning of charism.

What is charism? The term "charism" is widely used in religious life to describe a gift of the Spirit bestowed on an individual for a specific mission of the Church. The word, however, is frequently misconstrued. It was noted by the participants that we often identify charism with what we do. But "charism" is not ministry. Charism is a "deep story" of a religious community, as the Marist theologian Bernard Lee put it. It is a gift given to a founder or foundress for the mission of the Church. In the years following the Second Vatican Council, members of religious communities and institutes have been called to be faithful to the "charism of the founder."



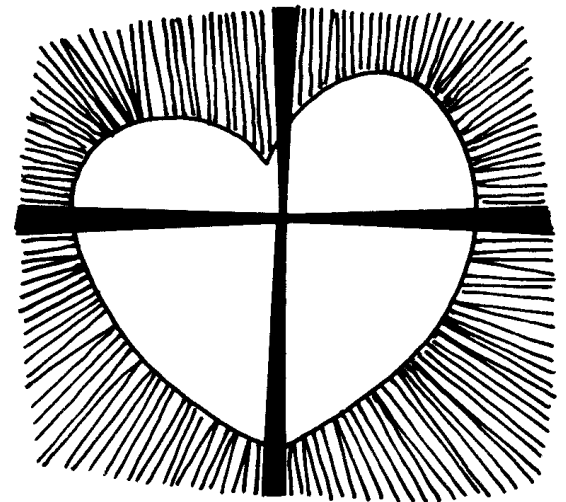
For us Dehonians, our charism is one of reparatory oblation. Cst. 6 affirms that the specific aim of the Congregation, according to Fr. Dehon's intention, should be found in our imitation of the oblation of Christ, who is Priest and Victim: "In founding the Congregation of *Oblates*, the Priests of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, Father Dehon wanted its members to unite in an explicit way their religious and apostolic life with the reparatory oblation of Christ to the Father for people." In his writing, "Charism and Mission," P.J. McGuire proposed that Fr. Dehon's charism

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was nurtured by three spiritual traditions: the French school of spirituality, which centers on the centrality of the Person of Jesus Christ; the Paray-le-Monial approach to the Sacred Heart, which focuses on the Heart as the symbol of Christ's boundless love for the Father and for people; and the *Spiritual Exercises* of Ignatius Loyola, which emphasize the call to respond to the sacrificial love of Christ.

Our charism is something that is both internalized and externalized in our spiritual, community, and apostolic life. Our Dehonian spirituality is based on the charism of our founder, which makes us unique and distinct from other communities. Our charism doesn't stop with our spirituality. It is also lived out in our community life, which is an important aspect of our religious experience. In his apostolic exhortation *Vita Consecrata*, Pope John Paul II describes community life as an "eloquent sign of ecclesial communion" and a "theological space" in which one experiences the Risen Lord. Our Cst. 63-67 regard community as an authentic center of Gospel life. And finally, our charism is expressed in our pastoral action. Our religious community was founded for a specific mission, and it is this charism that guides us in our mission to serve the Church and to meet the needs of those we minister.



In closing, I offer these words of P.J. McGuire on the life of love and reparation to the Sacred Heart: "The principal purpose of Father Dehon's Congregation is not the apostolate but the life of love, which begins in the experiences of Christ's great love for us, creating in us his attitudes and dispositions, which in turn leads us to love, live, and act as He did" (*Charism and Mission*, 43). Our love for God, as manifested in our spirituality, community, and apostolic life, has the potential to bring people to come to know and respond to the love that God has for them.

Fraternally,