



Dehonians USA

PRIESTS OF THE SACRED HEART

November 21, 2023

Dear Brothers,

In my years of teaching at Sacred Heart Seminary and School of Theology, I noticed a growing number of seminarians who are drawn to the “smells and bells” of the old rites and the traditional practices of the previous generations. It’s not uncommon to hear Latin hymns sung more frequently at Mass in seminaries and to see seminarians occasionally dressed in cassock. Some seem to be trying to be more Catholic than the Pope.

During my visitation and conversation with members of the Houston community, the topic of young people embracing traditional Catholicism came up. Tim Gray,



Richard Johnston, and Quang Nguyen noted that this could be seen as a reaction or a disappointment with what’s happening in the church and society. Tim further described the movement as a pendulum swinging in the opposite direction to the culture around it. Some describe how some young Catholics are embracing these “old ways” as a rebellion against modernity and a desire for something ethereal and transcendent. In some cases, one could add that this

embrace is a rebuke of their parents' lukewarmness in their Catholic faith.

As more millennials and members of Generation Z – those born between 1981 and 1996 and between 1997 and 2013 respectively– show an interest in traditional Catholicism, we have seen potential candidates applying to our community who prefer more traditional liturgical and theological practices. It’s no secret that traditional religious communities tend to attract the most vocations these days. In light of that, some SCJ confreres have raised the question of whether we should adapt to the changing times to attract vocations to our religious community.

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Each generation of religious brings unique gifts and convictions to religious life, as well as the world and the church. These perspectives are shaped by our familial, theological, and ideological backgrounds. At the Religious Formation Congress held in Chicago on November 10-11, 2023, a religious sister asked a poignant question about how to foster intergenerational living among members of religious communities: "How do we meet each other at midpoint?" One of the panelists explained that the road to midpoint begins with us listening to each other's stories, acknowledging each other's gifts, and recognizing that we depend on each other.



There are two reasons why I started to write this letter. The first is to bluntly ask: Should we welcome candidates with a more traditional sense of church than what many of us feel called to? If we do, how do we walk along that road to the midpoint where we hear each other's stories, acknowledge each other's gifts, and recognize our dependence on one another?

We often hear terms such as "conservative" and "traditional" when describing styles of church that are different than our own. But it is not just the younger generations that have fallen under those terms. In each generation, there is diversity in our theological and ideological stances.

Again, how do we find that road to the midpoint? How do we hear God's voice, including the Dehonian call, within styles of church that may be very different than our own? Are we willing to listen to how the Dehonian charism may be expressed in the young people of today? How can we move out of our comfort zones and hear it among our own brothers whose style of church may be different than our own?

In religious life, it is not the shoes that we wear that define the path that we walk, and sometimes it is not even the path itself. It is the destination, the home that we find in the Sacred Heart.

Fraternally,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "V. J. Allen". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.