



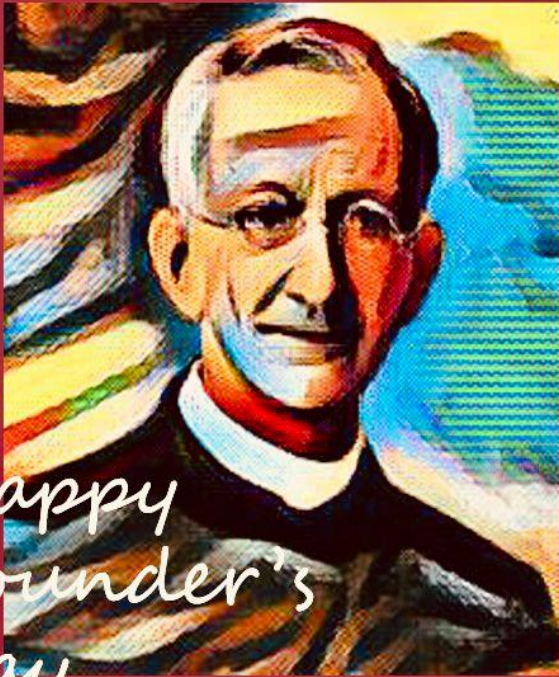
Dehonians USA

PRIESTS OF THE SACRED HEART

March 14, 2024

Dear Brothers,

The beauty of reading is that it enables us to enter into another world, fostering our imagination to fill in the gaps left by the author. As Celeste Ng, the Asian American author of *Our Missing Hearts* and *Everything I Never Told You*, reminds us, “The story is truly finished – and meaning is made – not when the author adds the last period, but when the reader enters.” The writer’s words have a life of their own. And readers play an important role in creating meaning from or giving meaning to a text based on their prior knowledge and experiences.



Fr. Leo John Dehon

March 14/1843 - August 12/1925

With Fr. Dehon’s writings, we are invited to enter his world and imagine what it’s like to be him as a young man within his family, as a seminarian in Rome, as a priest ministering in Soissons, as founder of the congregation, and as a religious enduring trials and betrayals. His writings indicate that he was a man with patience, compassion, dedication, vision, apostolic zeal, spiritual rigor, and mystical asceticism. Embracing trials with the spirit of *fiat* and a sense of victimhood defined by love and reparation were among his traits, enabling him to overcome many obstacles. His pact of love reveals this spirit: “I give myself completely to Our Lord to serve him in all things and to do his will in all things. I am ready, with the help of his grace to do and to endure whatever he wills.”

In the early days of the foundation of the Congregation, he endured opposition from outside and within and the ordeal of the *Consumatum est*. What kept Fr. Dehon strong and optimistic? It was his deep spiritual life that gave him serenity, optimism, and revitalization. In moments of silence in Eucharistic adoration amidst the chaos of the world, e.g., the Industrial Revolution and the French Revolution, and authentic

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service of the Church, Fr. Dehon found peace and vitality. Perhaps, the *Consumatum est* was providential, for it gave Fr. Dehon and the young congregation a renewed vision for foreign mission work, the social apostolate, and evangelization.

Father Dehon was known for trusting people and welcoming sometimes questionable characters to be his collaborators. However, this trust often led him to grievance and tears because of their betrayals. One such person was Fr. Bernard Germain Blanchal, SCJ, an ambitious person who wanted to become superior general and make the congregation an institute exclusively for the diocese. Due to his ambition, Fr. Blanchal was in constant conflict with Fr. Dehon, seeking opportunities to take the superior general position from Fr. Dehon and to steer the congregation in a different direction. Despite this, Fr. Dehon still accepted him as he was. What inspired him to do so? The answer lies in the words of the second superior general of the congregation, Fr. Joseph Lawrence Philippe: “[Fr. Dehon] carried with him the love of Christ, a love that progressively led him to devotion of the Sacred Heart, to whose service he would consecrate his life.” Fr. Dehon’s ultimate desire was to win souls for Christ.



If I had to imagine or recreate one scene in Fr. Dehon’s life, I would choose the moment when he held the dying Fr. Blanchal in his arms. What thoughts were going through Fr. Dehon’s mind at that time? Did any past grievances and tears come to Fr. Dehon’s mind? Were there any other people present? Did Fr. Blanchal say anything to Fr. Dehon before passing away? If so, what did he say and how did Fr. Dehon react? And how did Fr. Dehon experience God in this heartwarming moment?

I believe that by reading Fr. Dehon’s writings, we can be inspired to be imaginative beyond the written words on the page.

Happy Founder’s Day.

Fraternally,