

Sacred Heart Seminary and School of Theology
Vien V. Nguyen, SCJ

Founder's Day
Leo John Dehon, SCJ
March 14, 1843

Last month, during my trip to Brazil for the centennial celebration of our theological school in Taubate, I spoke to my superior general, Fr. Carlos Luis Suarez Codorniú, SCJ, about the challenges of finding religious to serve in rural and isolated missions in the US Province. He confirmed that it was an issue in the congregation, as most religious prefer to work in comfortable places in the city. My recent conversation with the provincial superior of the Brazil Sao Paulo Province further confirmed this point. He explained that his province has many difficult ministries in very isolated areas in the Amazon, and it is always a challenge to find willing members to serve there.

As ministers of the church, we may encounter moments when our bishop or religious superior asks us to undertake a difficult mission that we may not want to accept or feel prepared for. We may have our doubts and hesitations. If we are feeling this way, just know that we are not alone. Jeremiah gave God excuses for not wanting to be a prophet. Jonah refused to listen to God's instruction to prophesy to the people of Nineveh. And Moses suggested that God ask someone else to lead the Israelites out of Egypt. We know that God is very patient and will work with us until we say yes. As God works with us and as we negotiate with God, it is important that we keep in mind God's words to Moses in today's first reading from Exodus: "Go to the people."

Go to the people! Jesus himself was a model of this life of going to the people. He did not wait for people to come to him, but he went out to them where they were. He went to the sick, the poor, and the marginalized. He brought them healing, hope, and restoration of dignity. As ministers of the church, we are called to follow his example and to walk with people on their journey of faith and life.

"Go to the people" was the way of life embraced by Fr. Leo John Dehon, founder of the Priests of the Sacred Heart, whose birthday is today. Despite being born into a wealthy family, he chose to serve the working class and struggling families. He fell in love with the people in his first assignment as a parish priest and saw their struggles. He was determined to respond to their spiritual needs in the name of the church. Instead of letting them come to him, he went to them. Fr. Dehon and his fellow religious priests went to factories where workers labored long hours to administer sacraments to them. He challenged Christian factory owners to adhere to the social teaching of the Church and improve the working and living conditions of the workers. He established youth organizations and clubs for children whose parents labored long hours in the factory, providing a safe place for them to receive support and catechism to grow in the faith. In his own way, he testified to the love of God revealed in the Sacred Heart.

Go to the people! This way of life requires a deep spiritual prayer, the foundation of who we are and what we do. Going to the people means we need to be present and available to people, not

only in church or during Mass but also in schools, hospitals, nursing homes, prisons, and immigration detention centers. Going to the people means a spirit of openness to step out of our comfort zones and into the reality of human life. Going to the people also means that we need to be humble to the guidance of the Holy Spirit, leading us to places that, at times, we do want to go.

Go to the people!