



# SCJ NEWS

Newsletter of the U.S. Province of the Priests of the Sacred Heart (Dehonians)



Fr. Jim holds up the Lakota-English dictionary he used in South Dakota

## A people of generosity and presence

“The word for ‘generosity’ in the Lakota language begins with ‘heart.’ Generosity is considered one of the greatest virtues of the Lakota people.”

-Fr. Jim Walters, SCJ

“Our first task in approaching another people, another culture, another religion, is to take off our shoes, for the place we are approaching is holy. Else we may find ourselves treading on [people’s] dreams. More seriously still, we may forget that God was here before our arrival.”

It was with this quote from Rev. Max Warren, an Anglican priest, that Fr. Jim Walters, SCJ, began a presentation on the Lakota people to students and staff at Sacred Heart Seminary and School of Theology .

He and Fr. Yvon Sheehy, SCJ, teamed up for a lunchtime talk, reflecting on their years of ministry in

South Dakota.

Referencing the quote from Rev. Warren, Fr. Jim spoke of his first Sunday Mass at a reservation church. Fr. Jim had studied the Lakota language during his years as chaplain at St. Joseph’s Indian School and decided to open the Mass with a traditional greeting in Lakota.

The words fell flat. After the Mass, he learned why. Until 1978 – for over 100 years – indigenous people were forbidden by the government to speak their own language.

“And here I was, having the audacity to speak a language which the tribal chairman was forbidden to learn or speak in his own communi-

ty,” said Fr. Jim.

It quickly taught Fr. Jim to be humble and learn from the people with whom he was to minister.

He spoke of the beauty of the Lakota language, noting that much of its purpose is to communicate with God. “There are no foul words in Lakota, no curse words,” said Fr. Jim. “The worst that you can call someone is a ‘turkey.’ There are no F-bombs in Lakota, no words that would allow you to take God’s name in vain. The relationship with God in the language is both transcendent and immanent.”

Fr. Yvon talked about the background and history of the Lakota people. He noted that they came from the area now known as the Carolinas. The



Fr. Jean Claude Mbassi, an SCJ priest from Cameroon, continues the Dehonian mission in Lower Brule, SD.

### Continue the mission!

The Priests of the Sacred Heart have served in South Dakota for over 100 years. Are you discerning a vocation to the religious life, to the priesthood? Could you picture yourself helping to continue this mission? Scan the QR code to be in contact with our vocation director.



first native people to domesticate horses, the Lakota moved west and eventually settled in South Dakota. In the summer they lived on the plains and in the winter they retreated to the Black Hills. But as with many indigenous people, they were forcibly removed to the more challenging lands on which the reservations are now located.

In 1972, as a young seminarian doing summer ministry in Cherry Creek, SD, Fr. Yvon learned on a home visit just how challenging reservation life could be. The mother of the household got up, put on her coat and excused herself. "Where are you going?" asked Fr. Yvon, confused. She told him that she was headed to the outhouse. There were 150 homes in the tiny reservation town of Cherry Creek and he soon learned that only four of them had plumbing and electricity. One of the four was the small house that the SCJs lived in next to the church.

"It has certainly changed since then, but it gives you a sense of what life has been like for the Lakota people," said Fr. Yvon.

The language of the Lakota continues to give insight to their culture. Lakota verbs do not indicate time, there is no tense for past, present and future. "This reflects their relationship of living in the present," said Fr. Jim. "When God revealed himself to Moses he said, 'I am,' a God that is in the present. But we often struggle to live in the present, we are always thinking, 'What's next?' The Lakota people have taught me to better live in the present."

Fr. Yvon added that it is not only living "in the present" that is important, but also "being present."

"Don't make an appointment to see me," Fr. Yvon remembered a Lakota woman telling him. "I am not going to clean the house for you. Take us as we are."

The message: be present to people in the everyday moments of life. People who are remembered well are the ones who have taken the time to be present to others "as they are."

He and Fr. Yvon both spoke of the



Fr. Yvon talks about his years of ministry in SD

generosity of the Lakota people. Again, Fr. Jim shared an example from the Lakota language.

"The word for 'generosity' in the Lakota language begins with 'heart,'" he said. "Generosity is considered one of the greatest virtues of the Lakota people."

And being a grateful recipient of

that generosity is also important. After a wake service or funeral, the SCJ priests were always offered extra food from the meal. "You could say that you would take it home with you for later, but you never said, 'no thank-you,'" said Fr. Jim. "That would be rude."

Both SCJs spoke of the integration of Christian and Lakota traditions. When he was bishop of Rapid City, Archbishop Charles Chaput created a liturgical committee to identify indigenous practices that could be incorporated into the Catholic liturgy. One such example is the smudging ceremony, which serves as an act of purification. The Lakota language itself is now an accepted liturgical language.

Before concluding the presentation, Fr. Jim walked participants through the Sign of the Cross and Lord Have Mercy in the Lakota language before giving a final blessing in Lakota.

## Dedication to Prayer

**"We recognize that the faithfulness of each member and of our communities, and the fruitfulness of our apostolate, depend on our dedication to prayer..."**

(SCJ Constitutions No. 76)

"It is self-evident that we must pray, and as a religious community, we require both a private personal prayer life and a collective prayer life," wrote Fr. Tom Cassidy, SCJ, reflecting on the SCJ Rule of Life No. 76 in the October, 2023 edition of *As a Rule*. **"Personal prayer changes me, and communal prayer changes all of us.** Every time we pray, we encounter God, we encounter Jesus. Although we may not always feel it, we have faith that our encounters with God and Jesus transform me, transform us."



*As a Rule* is a monthly electronic publication of the US Province in which writers reflect on a topic inspired by a passage in the SCJ Rule of Life. Scan the QR code to read Fr. Tom's full reflection, access previous issues and/or subscribe.



# New doctor, New director!

In February, Fr. Joseph Mukuna, SCJ, successfully defended his doctoral thesis at Loyola University Chicago. The title of it: "Reading the Prologue of John's Gospel as a Midrash with a View to Examining a Local Parting of the Ways."

In layman's terms, Fr. Joseph explored how John's gospel may have given insight into what is termed as the "Parting of the Ways," the gradual development of Christianity as something distinct from the Jewish tradition.

Several Dehonian priests and brothers attended the defense in person, while others, along with members of the faculty and staff of Sacred Heart Seminary and School of Theology, where Fr. Joseph has served as an adjunct professor, viewed the defense via Zoom.

Fr. Joseph is a member of the Congolese Province who has been in the US Province since 2015, pursuing studies at Loyola University Chicago. He has served in formation at the international formation community in Pietermaritzburg, South Africa, worked with the Congolese Bishops Conference as a Bible instructor for

the ecclesiastic Province of Kisangani, and on an academic team with the Pauline Sisters editing and publishing the first edition of the French version of the African Bible, *LA BIBLE AFRICAINE*. Fr. Joseph is 47.

"I joined the SCJs when I was turning 19," said Fr. Joseph. "When I look back, I can honestly say that I grew up with the Priests of the Sacred Heart. I was educated (and continue to be) and guided by this family; I always consider the Dehonians as my second family. I now have brothers and friends all over the world thanks to the Priests of the Sacred Heart.

"To be a Dehonian for me is to struggle to live the 'Dehonian dream'

which is to be a 'prophet of love and servant of reconciliation.' This is a kind of everyday call and challenge. It is also the sense that I give to my training in New Testament studies, to become more aware of the love of God for humanity made manifest in the open heart of Jesus, and to learn how to talk about this love. Being a Dehonian today is to make relevant the 'Dehonian dream' in our world in bringing joy and hope to people, and to work for peace and reconciliation."

**As of April 2, Fr. Joseph will serve as the director of the Dehon Study Center.**

"With French as one of his native languages and with his proficient research skills, I am confident that he will serve us well in this ministry," wrote Fr. Vien Nguyen, SCJ, in his letter announcing the appointment. The decision was made in collaboration with the Congolese Province.



Fr. Joseph Mukuna, Ph.D

Fr. Joseph is pictured below, defending his dissertation at Loyola.



## More than just traditions

Adoration and First Friday devotions are more than just prayer traditions for the Priests of the Sacred Heart, they are among the essential elements of Dehonian Spirituality in practice.

Fr. Andrzej Sudol, SCJ, is pastor of St. Martin of Tours parish in Franklin, WI. Just before he assumed the role, Fr. Carlos Luis Suarez Codorniu, SCJ, came to the US Province in 2022 for the general visitation. Knowing that Fr. Andrzej was about to begin ministry at St. Martin of Tours, the two spoke about ways in which to make a parish more Dehonian. Top of the list: "First Friday Devotions and Adoration," said Fr. Andrzej, "along with a 'shrine' or information area about Fr. Dehon."

The pastoral team at St. Martin of Tours agreed and decided to make First Fridays and Adoration a priority for the parish in 2023.

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"We encouraged and explained the idea of Adoration and First Friday in a variety of ways," said Fr. Andrzej. Slowly, the First Friday gatherings grew from about 20 people in the morning to upwards of 70. This includes several families who take part in Catholic Schoolhouse, a Catholic homeschool program. A smaller gathering in the evening continues to take place.

"What we have done is a start, but we must do more to help people know and understand these traditions in the context of our Dehonian charism," said Fr. Andrzej. "The three-year Eucharistic revival program is an excellent opportunity to explain and popularize Adoration and First Friday at St. Martin of Tours. We must take advantage of it.

We SCJs must also take advantage of this opportunity to share our beautiful Dehonian traditions.

- Fr. Andrzej Sudol, SCJ

"We SCJs must also take advantage of this opportunity to share our beautiful Dehonian traditions. It is good for us as Dehonians to be present in prayer with others, it has a greater impact than many of us realize. Busy in ministry, we often struggle to find such moments with the laity in prayer. But it is an important way to share who we are as Dehonians, and it is important for our own prayer lives, regardless if we minister in a parish.

If you are in the Milwaukee area, you are invited to join the parish for Monday Adoration at 6:00 p.m. and/or First Fridays at 8:30 a.m. or 7:30 p.m. The address: 7963 S. 116th St., Franklin, WI. Or visit the parish website for more information:

[www.stmofTours.org](http://www.stmof Tours.org)



Bishop Donald J. Hying of Madison ordains Paul Phong Hoang to the diaconate. Frater Truc Tran and Fr. Jack Kurps assist with the ceremony. Dn. Paul is pictured with his parents lower right.

## Ordained to the diaconate

"Despite our unworthiness, if God calls us, he will take care of us. There were many moments in my journey during formation that God either steered me in a certain direction or sent people to assist me in difficult times. Take courage and cooperate with his grace, respond to his invitation"

-Dn. Paul Phong Hoang, SCJ

**O**n December 9, Paul Phong Hoang, SCJ, was ordained to the diaconate by Bishop Donald J. Hying of the diocese of Madison, WI. In a ceremony filled with the blend of cultures that reflect Dn. Paul's life, the music, readings, and prayers were done in a mix of Vietnamese and English. The ordination took place at Sacred Heart Seminary and School of Theology, where just a few days earlier he had completed his MDiv.

ed his MDiv.

Dn. Paul, 31, is originally from Ha Tien, Kien Giang, Vietnam. His family immigrated to the United States in 2007 and settled in Houston, Texas. Before pursuing his vocation to religious life, Dn. Paul earned a bachelor's degree in biology from the University of Houston.

In 2016 he began studies with the community and professed his first vows in 2018. Dn. Paul did his

pastoral year in Lower Brule, SD, and has been involved in a variety of other ministries including the ESL program with the Vietnamese Association in Uptown Chicago, the Vietnamese Eucharistic Youth Movement (TNNT), St. Ann Center for Intergenerational Care in Milwaukee, Dismas Ministry, Juvenile Jail visitation, Catholic Charities, and with St. Martin of Tours parish.

Last year was a busy one for him. Dn. Paul made his perpetual profession of vows in May and did cross-cultural studies in Ecuador before returning to SHSST for his final semester of seminary studies.

Reflecting on his call to be a Dehonian, Dn. Paul said that “I was attracted to the SCJs’ simplicity, diversity and community life,” adding that “my journey of faith is an existential one. I was haunted by the idea of God and attracted to the love of Christ...

“What resonates with me in our Dehonian Spirituality is the focus on love, as well as the image of the Sacred Heart. It seems generic yet profoundly universal and necessary in our world. Love is what ultimately captivates and converts the heart.”

Dn. Paul is now a part of the pastoral team that serves six parishes in northern Mississippi. “I look forward to learning the basics of priesthood in

parish settings, applying the training I received from the seminary, and getting experience in how to live my vocation as a Dehonian in active ministry,” said Dn. Paul. “It is important for me to gradually transition into my new role as deacon; that means being more attentive toward the liturgy, preaching, serving at Mass, and most importantly, living authentically to my vocation as future priest.”

And that future is coming up soon — Dn. Paul will be ordained to the priesthood on June 1, 2024, at Our Lady of Guadalupe in Houston.

When Dn. Paul was asked if he has advice for young people considering a vocational call, he said that “despite our unworthiness, if God calls us, he will take care of us. There were many moments in my journey during formation that God either steered me in a certain direction or sent people to assist me in difficult times.

**“Take courage and cooperate with his grace, respond to his invitation.”**

### Photos and video

Scan the QR code to access a video of Dn. Paul’s ordination, as well as photos:



Br. Duane speaking to parishioners during anniversary celebrations in South Dakota.

## The vocation of brother, and of priest

Being a brother has taught me to look for solidarity with God’s people,” said Br. Duane Lemke, SCJ, speaking about his vocation during an evening of reflection with parishioners in northern Mississippi in January.

“We each find holiness in the path we have committed to,” he continued. “No path is deeper or more holy. We can learn how to be holy and how to live the Christian life by witnessing to each other. The vows that I take as a brother don’t separate me from families, from other men and women. It just gives me a different perspective. Your witness enriches my life.”

Br. Duane emphasized that his vocation as a religious brother is fully intertwined with his vocation as a Priest of the Sacred Heart. “I cannot separate my brotherhood from the Priests of the Sacred Heart,” but added that at first glance, it may seem like a contradiction.

“When I introduce myself, I say, ‘I am BROTHER Duane, a PRIEST of the Sacred Heart,’” he said. Though it may sound confusing, it is an opportunity to talk about the call of baptismal priesthood, the type of “priest” referenced in PRIESTS of the Sacred Heart.



“When we say we are priests, we mean baptismal priesthood, the priesthood we all received: priest, prophet, king,” said Br. Duane. “A priest is someone who makes an offering. Parents exercise their baptismal priesthood when they offer their time and energies to their children. Spouses are priests when they offer their futures to each other. Nurses are priests when they offer their talents and abilities to their patients. Teachers offer themselves to their students...

Priests of the Sacred Heart offer themselves in a specific way. Our offering is conscious of the love the Sacred Heart.

-Br. Duane Lemke, SCJ

“Priests of the Sacred Heart offer themselves in a specific way. Our offering is conscious of the love the Sacred Heart. We try to be conscious of God’s love for us. We offer ourselves to people who need to know what that kind of love looks like. That’s who we are...

“Being a brother [with the Priests of the Sacred Heart] means that I stand with one foot in the life of the laity and the other in life of the clergy. I am both and neither at the same time. It means learning to be in a relationship with people as if they are a family, but they are not my family. I am a steward to things I do not own. I am an advocate, I am a support in times of celebration and I am a witness and companion in times of suffering. I am devoted to St. Joseph, husband of Mary (Joseph is the patron saint of religious brothers), I live under a Rule, I am a brother.”



Wearing winter clothes lent to them by their Mississippi hosts, students from our Dehonian school in Brazil hold up the Brazilian flag in the snow.

## Brazilian exchange students treated to a Mississippi snow storm

For the second year in a row, Sacred Heart School in Southaven, MS, hosted exchange students from Colégio São Luiz (St. Louis) in Brusque, Brazil, a school sponsored by the Priests of the Sacred Heart (Dehonians).

The idea of an exchange between São Luiz and Sacred Heart came about several years ago when Sacred Heart’s principal, Bridget Martin, met Fr. Silvano Joao da Costa, SCJ, principal of Colégio São Luiz. Both were at an international meeting of Dehonian educators in Rome.

Sacred Heart students have been pen-pals with students from São Luiz for several years. As part of the Dehonian educational community, students connect with schools throughout the United States and in other parts of the world via Zoom. However, the onsite exchange program takes the conversations to a different level and helps students real-

ize that the Dehonian charism is the same everywhere.

“The Sacred Heart students love to welcome the exchange students and show them life as a young teen living in Mississippi,” said Bridget. “They also enjoy hearing about the differences in school experiences.”

The four students — Ana, Helena, Maria and Wilson — along with their teacher, Mariane, arrived in Mississippi just after the New Year’s, traveling over 5,000 miles in 24 hours.

### Traveling suitcase

One of the things that the Brazilian students brought with them was their Traveling Suitcase. The project, which originated at São Luiz under the direction of Fr. Silva, was created to help connect Dehonian schools through their shared mission. So far, it has traveled to all of the Dehonian

schools in Brazil and Chile. Inside the suitcase, there is a “Little Fr. Dehon” doll and the story of the Good Samaritan, along with a log book. The Mississippi students were asked to add to the log book, describing how they help their neighbors and show their availability. The outside of the luggage is decorated like a vintage trunk, covered in art and stickers from all the countries and places it has been, including an emblem from Sacred Heart School. The Traveling Suitcase’s story is not finished, as it will continue its voyage around the world, eventually stopping at all Dehonian Schools.

While in Mississippi, the exchange students participated in the daily lessons and routines at Sacred Heart School, including homework assignments. In addition to attending classes with SHS students, the guests enjoyed dining at some of the area’s most popular restaurants, as well as the homes of school and parish families. They went to the Memphis Zoo Lights, toured Graceland, went ice skating and watched the famous march of the Peabody ducks. They also joined Sacred Heart students on a field trip to the National Civil Rights Museum.

In Brazil, January means hot and humid summer weather. The visitors knew it would be winter in Mississippi, but they didn’t expect the uncharacteristic snow and arctic temps that greeted them. Actually, nobody did! For some of the Brazilians it was their first time seeing snow. They made snow angels, snowmen, and had snowball fights. Local families lent the visitors clothing to stay warm.

During their final Mass in Mississippi, the São Luis students were presented with a statue of the Sacred Heart of Jesus to take home; they received blessings for safe travels and success in the new school year.

In June, a group of Sacred Heart students will once again make the trip to Colégio São Luiz to continue the cultural exchange.



SCJs process in with Bishop Joseph Kopacz for the 20th Anniversary Mass at Christ the King.

### 20th anniversary celebrated in Southaven

Bishop Joseph Kopacz was the main celebrant at a Mass on February 23 celebrating the 20th anniversary of the dedication of Christ the King church in Southaven, MS.

“As we reflect on the past 20 years and look forward to the future, let us continue to walk together in faith, in unity and love,” said Fr. Hendrik Ardianto, SCJ, a member of the pastoral team that serves Christ the King. “We’ll walk the road of life together, day by day, with love in our hearts every step of the way.”

The parish itself began as a mission of Sacred Heart Church in Walls; about 20 families gathered in a car auction barn every week for Mass. The first church was built on State Line Road in Southaven and the mission grew into a parish. Twenty years ago, the original church was replaced with the present structure to accommodate the nearly 2,000 families that

now make up the parish. Mass and other services are offered in both Spanish and English, reflecting the changing demographics of the area.

Christ the King is a part of a six-parish cluster that is now served by a pastoral team; Fr. Ardi is currently team moderator. The other parishes: Hernando Holy Spirit, Olive Branch Queen of Peace, Senatobia St. Gregory, Robinsonville Good Shepherd and Holly Springs St. Joseph.

### Bishop Perry leads Ash Wednesday reflections

“God gives us Lent not to give up what pleases us, but to give up what displeases God.”

The quote is from Bishop Joseph Perry, retired auxiliary bishop of Chicago, who led a day of recollection on Ash Wednesday for students and staff at Sacred Heart Seminary and School of Theology.

Bishop Perry emphasized that Lent is primarily a time for spiritual growth. “Lent can come across as a somber time in which we give up some sort of pleasure for 40 days, like candy, alcohol or junk food only to pick it up again after Holy Saturday. But essentially, what we are to give up is sin, not pleasure. God wants us to tackle the important flaws that keep us from being more loving, more prayerful, more just and more compassionate...”

“Lent is a time when God wants us to seriously grapple with what



Bishop Perry prior to Ash Wednesday Mass

may have become deeply rooted attitudes and patterns in us; attitudes of superiority and pride; of narcissism, competition, impatience.”

Bishop Perry said that it is vital that people come to God in humility and allow God to speak to us in reflection. “Start with five minutes of total abandonment to God in silence,” he said. “Strip away the distractions that come between us and God. Constant busyness cancels out the very thing that we need to revitalize: hearing the voice of God.”

The bishop has a long history with SHSST. He taught canon law at the seminary for many years and continues to be a frequent visitor.

### Mysterious ways

Though originally from Colombia, Fr. Juan Carlos Castañeda Rojas, SCJ, studied and professed vows as a member of the Priests of the Sacred Heart in the US Province. On February 16, he celebrated his fifth anniversary of ordination in a place he didn’t expect to be five years into his priesthood: Ecuador.

His first assignment after ordination was at Our Lady of Guadalupe in Houston, but as the saying goes, “God writes straight with crooked lines.”

For much of the past five years Fr. Juancho has served in our Dehonian mission in Ecuador.

“Last Friday I was able to celebrate a Thanksgiving Mass for these years of ministry with the people at the parish,” wrote Fr. Juancho. “I have always said that God works in mysterious ways and one of those ways brought me to Ecuador. It has been a challenging experience, but also a rewarding experience. For sure I have learned many things that I did not learn in school.

“I’m grateful to the people here who have helped me to grow in my ministry, to be a good pastor, to be a good shepherd. I cannot believe that five years has passed already since my ordination. It is with joy that I celebrate this gift and call to be a Dehonian ‘prophet of love and servant of reconciliation.’ I’m grateful to the many people who have walked with me on this journey and who have helped me to become the priest and religious that I’m today.”



Fr. Juancho celebrates his anniversary with parishioners in Ecuador.



## DEHONIANS Priests of the Sacred Heart

Our ministries are diverse, as are our members. Yet our goal is the same: to work with a common heart in service to God’s people, reflecting the love of Christ as experienced by our founder, Fr. Leo John Dehon

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you can join us!**

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