



## A Year with Venerable Father Leo John Dehon

*The second in a series of monthly biographical sketches as we prepare to commemorate the centenary of his death on August 12, 2025*



**Fr. Leo John Dehon: Social Questions of His Day** Fr. Dehon's first assignment as a priest, in the working city of Saint-Quentin, France, presented him with many social challenges: migrants who moved from their ancestral villages and were now living in very poor and harsh conditions, factories that had hazardous working environments with long hours and low pay, insufficient educational opportunities for the poor, and a society becoming more and more secular. Fr. Dehon brought an open heart and mind to the situation. Within two weeks of his assignment, Fr. Dehon saw what the parish needed, writing: "For the good of the apostolate in St. Quentin, we are badly in need of a Catholic high school, a youth center, and a Catholic newspaper." It took some time, but Fr. Dehon initiated all three projects. Fr. Dehon also organized a Workers'

Union at the youth center for older boys, taught courses in social economy, established a study club for future employers, met regularly with present employers, and was instrumental in forming a Diocesan Office of Social Work. Addressing these important social issues was not what Fr. Dehon had envisioned, but he had great faith in God's plans. He gave his "Yes" to God's call just as Mary responded "Fiat" when the angel Gabriel gave her the news of God's plans at the Annunciation (Luke 1:38). Throughout the rest of his life, when his plans or dreams did not work out as he intended, Fr. Dehon would continue to faithfully reply, "Fiat." "Ecce Ancilla" is a common phrase you will hear Dehonians say, and it refers to Mary's "Fiat." May we all live with such openness to receive Jesus into our lives. Next month we will learn about Fr. Dehon's establishment of a religious community.

**Quote:** *"May the disposition of my heart be a perpetual fiat and an unshakable peace!"*

**Reflection Question:**

*How do we say "Yes" to God's call in our lives?*

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