



A Year with Venerable Father Leo John Dehon

Preparing for the centenary of the founder's death in 2025

The fifth 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: The People's Priest

As we read earlier, many priests of Fr. Dehon's time saw religious life as a withdrawal from the world, but Fr. Dehon saw his newly formed Congregation as an apostolic community supporting each other in the midst of the world. Together, he and his collaborators set out to address many of the social problems facing people in the town of Saint-Quentin. They went out to the streets and listened to the people, learning about their challenges. Some members became chaplains to factory workers, some continued the ministries St. John's high school, some preached retreats. Although the work they did was varied, it was all done in a spirit of love and oblation (as an offering to God). They brought open hearts and open minds to the people they encountered.



Fr. Dehon stands on the right, with collaborators in Rome after meeting with Pope Leo XIII

Fr. Dehon organized many gatherings and conferences. He brought together business and civic leaders to creatively address social problems. He brought together faculty and seminarians to improve the formation of seminarians. There are many photos of Fr. Dehon in small and large groups of people, because he believed in bringing people together to listen, learn and work towards God's kingdom. People were attracted by his kindness, wisdom and vision. People at many levels of society trusted him.

"Sint Unum" was an important concept to Fr. Dehon. Translated from Latin, it means "that they may be one." He yearned for unity among his congregation and among the people of God. Although the members were active in social issues, their work was always rooted in Christ. For Fr. Dehon, unity begins with our union with

Christ. Then, in union with Christ and impelled by God's great love for us, we go out to the world to foster unity among people. His Congregation was characterized by the greatest care for people, particularly the most deprived. For all of these reasons, he became known as "The People's Priest."

Next month, we will read about how he became known as "The Priest with a Pen."



Fr. Dehon, middle of the front row, with collaborators and First Communicants

Quote:

"The simplest way of serving God is to serve by love. It is, indeed, the gentlest way. Fear intimidates; hope is not without a certain uneasiness, but love knows neither the torments of fear nor the alarm of hope."

- Leo John Dehon, SCJ, *The Life of Love towards the Sacred Heart of Jesus*, 2nd Meditation

Reflection Question:

How can we serve others through love?

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Priests of the Sacred Heart
(Dehonians/SCJ) at:
www.dehoniansusa.org**

