



SUPERIORE GENERALE

**CONGREGAZIONE DEI SACERDOTI
DEL SACRO CUORE DI GESÙ**

Rome, March 3rd, 2008

Prot. N. 0035/2008

DEHONIAN VOCATIONS DAY

Message on the occasion of March 14th, date on which Fr Léon Dehon was born

Dear confreres and friends of the Dehonian Family,

On March 14th one hundred and sixty five years ago Fr Dehon was born at La Capelle. That date represents an important and specific point of reference for celebrating and bringing up- to-date a marvellous heritage that has enriched the Church and allowed our charism to manifest and express itself: "I leave you the greatest of all treasures, the Heart of Jesus".

It was on Léon Dehon's gift of life that the Spirit made our Congregation burgeon one hundred and thirty years ago, forever linking these two occasions in a single gift made for the good of all. The gift made to the world on that March 14th, continues to live and be offered today, in our life. To celebrate this date is therefore to make a sincere and loyal reference to the original inspiration of our existence as a religious family.

The gift that through the existence of Fr Dehon and that of many others who were inspired by him, and continue to be inspired by him, has come down to us and finds continuity in new vocations. There are many who see in Fr Dehon's spiritual path a proposal for today and a way towards holiness which in the Dehonian view leads us "to unite in an explicit way the religious and apostolic life with the reparatory oblation of Christ to the Father for people" (Cst 6).

For this we thank the Lord, because although in some contexts we feel the weight of diminishing numbers, resources and energies, in others we are witnessing a blossoming of generous responses. Let us not fail to send up our prayer for new vocations to the Lord, who never tires of being close to those whom He loves, and also our heartfelt gratitude for many confreres who are offering their energies and capabilities with commitment, that the Kingdom may grow. The issue of vocations is a fundamental problem for the mission in the Church and also for our Congregation.

The announcement of the person of Christ, which at the last General Conference we said was a priority because of its importance and urgency, needs announcers.

In his letter to the Romans St Paul asks: “But how can they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how can they believe in him of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone to preach?” (Rom 10:14). With these words the apostle reminds us that announcers are irreplaceable and of our commitment to make every effort to ensure that those who make his mission theirs be numerous.

We are nonetheless convinced that all our activities in favour of vocations cannot bear fruit except through the grace of God. Consequently, recalling Jesus’ invitation to “ask the Lord of the harvest to send out labourers into his harvest” (Lc 10:2), we wish to intensify our prayer that the Lord bless us with many, holy vocations that find their model and the strength to put themselves at the mission’s service in *Ecce venio* and *Ecce ancilla*. We want to do this with an especially intense prayer on this day of prayer and thanksgiving for the Dehonian vocation.

We seek to carry out our vocation in communion and sharing with our confreres, in all our communities and entities, and in the Congregation as a whole. As we seek God’s paths, this year, 2008, sees us all involved in the work of discernment which reaches its peak in chapter meetings. These chapters are held prior to the XXII General Chapter, whose theme, as shown in the title chosen, recalls what was said and already offers us a programme: “ ‘For the love of Christ impels us’ (2 Cor. 5:14): As ardent lovers of Christ uniting us in brotherhood, we proclaim the Gospel”.

We invite you to let yourselves be helped by the questionnaire that the preparatory commission sent you, getting involved both individually and as a community in this joint quest for greater faithfulness and willingness towards the mission that God asks from us in the Church and today’s world.

Easter, just around the corner, comes to illuminate us, indicating the goal and giving us strength for the journey. The resurrection of Jesus is life’s seal of victory over death, love’s victory over the sin that humiliates and divides us. The life of Christ our Easter is the new life offered to every man “through the Holy Spirit that has been given us” (Rom 5:5).

Let us pray for the Chapter:

O God our Father, You granted to Fr. Dehon the grace of experiencing the love of Jesus’ Heart, inflame us with the same love for You and for all humanity.

Send us your Holy Spirit, so that the love of Christ, present among us, may renew our communities, enabling us to give a witness of fraternal living to a divided and indifferent world.

Strengthened by Christ we commit ourselves to proclaim your reign of love for all so that You may be known and loved and “our joy may be full”. Amen.

Happy Easter!

Fr. José Ornelas Carvalho, scj
General Superior