

## General Conference Report, Friday, July 20, 2012

### What was heard; how to move forward

Much of Friday was spent working on the final message. After watching a film about SCJ education initiatives in Brazil, the Synthesis Committee presented the first draft of the final message. Members of the committee include Fr. Rinaldo Paganelli, Fr. Mathieu Yvon, Fr. Jesús Valdezate Soto and Fr. John van den Hengel.

Evangelization is lived out in a commitment to education; education — “Educare” — is an encompassing call that goes well beyond the traditional classroom. It is a “duty” that every adult contribute to the holistic development of young people. Moreover, Dehonians must take this “duty” a step further, contributing to the growth of young people through a basis in the charism of Fr. Leo John Dehon.

An educator modeled in the charism of Fr. Dehon seeks a holistic approach to learning including mind, body and spirit. Echoing what had been discussed throughout the days of the General Conference, the Synthesis Committee noted that education based in the Dehonian charism encourages creativity and calls the heart to open itself to others, especially to the weakest.

Acknowledging that the topic of the General Conference flowed from previous work done at education meetings in Salamanca, Spain, the final document noted three primary Dehonian values: 1) Adveniat Regnum Tuum (May Your Kingdom Come), 2) Ecce Venio (Behold I Come), and 3) Sint Unum (Be One With Others). These values were previously identified in Salamanca.

[During his presentation on Tuesday, Fr. John van den Hengel spoke in detail on these values and their basis in Fr. Dehon’s founding story or myth. The text of his talk is available in the Educare section of [www.dehon.it](http://www.dehon.it)]

The draft of the final document spoke of areas of focus for Dehonian educators, including mass media and social media. It was suggested that networks be developed to support and guide Dehonian educators and that educational activities be coordinated on the general level. Gatherings such as what was done in Salamanca, and now here in Neustadt, should continue.

After the initial presentation of the document, linguistic groups discussed it in detail and were invited to make written suggestions to the Synthesis Committee. Reviewing those suggestions, the committee spent the afternoon reworking the document. A revised text was shared with conference participants in the last session of the day. Final suggestions were to be integrated into the text, which would be shared with the congregation shortly after the conference.

### The changing face of the congregation

While the Synthesis Committee was busy incorporating the linguistic groups’ suggestions for the final document, the rest of conference participants heard a presentation from Fr. José Ornelas Carvalho on the statistics of the congregation and trends for the future. It was based on a similar presentation that he and general councilors have shared in provinces, regions and districts.

“Statistics are not the most important thing when speaking about the congregation,” said Fr. Ornelas, “But they give an objective starting point to our discussions as we look at the significance of education for the congregation.”

There are approximately 2,150 members of the Priests of the Sacred Heart. The largest concentration of SCJs continues to be in Europe with 948 members. However, the population of the congregation is shifting from the northern hemisphere to the southern hemisphere. In particular, Africa has changed from being a continent minis-



Fr. Jesús Valdezate Soto of the Synthesis Committee

tered to by missionaries from the north to being one whose SCJ population is now primarily African — and much larger than before. In 1991 there were 65 SCJs in Africa; in 2012 there are 337 members (again, primarily indigenous Africans).

In comparison, Europe — the birthplace of the Priests of the Sacred Heart — had 1,528 SCJs in 1991. As noted above, that number has changed significantly. Overall, there are fewer members worldwide than in 1991 but since 2003 the decrease has slowed considerably; it is thought that the congregation has stabilized, remaining near the 2100+ that it is at now.

As the congregation plans for the future — including plans with an emphasis on Educare — it is important to look at where the young people are. In Europe there are approximately 60 SCJ students, less than a third of what it had a little over 10 years ago. But in Africa, students make up almost 50% of the SCJ population. In Asia, 32% are students, and in South America almost 18% are students.

Fr. General noted that it is not simply that the population of the congregation is shifting, but in many ways, its character. The call is the same, but how it is lived is changing. The growth in Africa, Asia and South America is the result of early efforts by missionaries from Europe and North America.

The congregation has always had a missionary spirit, a spirit that was born out of the charism of Fr. Dehon. But now as SCJs in Europe and North America age and diminish in number, fewer people physically go to the missions.

“Some of the older provinces say that with lessening numbers that they cannot spare a man to go to the missions,” said Fr. Ornelas. “Younger entities might tell us that they are not yet ready to send people to the missions...”

“But we are an international congregation,” said Fr. Ornelas. “We cannot become enclosed in our own houses, we must leave our continents and continue our missionary spirit.” Being international means more than simply having members in many countries, it means developing an international spirit.

Fr. Ornelas also noted that while it can be challenging to address the global shift in the congregation, there is also much excitement as the SCJs’ presence grows. The congregation is found in more countries than ever before. Its impact on the world grows.

But while growth is exciting and life-giving, it is important to keep a critical eye on the affect of this new global dynamic in the congregation. The Northern Hemisphere has been the primary financial resource of SCJ ministries. As one SCJ said, money isn’t everything, but it does cost money to do ministry. How will diminishment in the Northern Hemisphere affect the financial stability of the congregation? How can young entities find ways of being self-supporting?

The day ended with a social in the house Pfaltzkeller (recreation room). On Saturday, the group will have its final session in the morning and closing Mass, followed by a trip to Worms.

[Click here](#) for photos from today or go to:

[www.generalate.smugmug.com](http://www.generalate.smugmug.com)

Fr. Heiner Wilmer with Kathleen Eslander, head of translation, during Friday evening’s social in the Pfaltzkeller

