

Educare as Dehonians the Young Generations

Directions from the VIII General Conference (Neustadt 2012)

Gathered at the VIIIth General Conference at Neustadt from July 16-21, 2012, we again became aware that the Congregation is called to engagement through the educational component of the gospel mission. The theme: *Educare as Dehonians the Young Generations* requested by the IInd Meeting of Educators at Salamanca (2008) and endorsed by the XXIInd General Chapter (2009) has brought to light the fact that every person is loved by God the Father in the Heart of his Son.

This Conference has allowed us an opportunity to re-examine the gifts that are our treasure, that which has given life to our Congregation throughout its history. Once more, we recalled a gift from the Spirit of God to the church: this gift is the faith experience of Fr. Dehon. We showed appreciation that our life is rooted in a life of love: a love of God that rests at the heart of our identity. This same spiritual legacy nourished profound and mystical contemplation in Fr. Dehon and led him to a political and social spirituality.

The word *educare* means far more than mere instruction, communication, or training. The task belonging to every adult to contribute to the holistic development of the personality of every young person requires us to share time, attention, and affection, all of which can serve toward the realization and formation of a sense of an adventurous life.

1. The Educational Legacy of Father Dehon

The celebration of this General Conference with its title, *Educare as Dehonians the Young Generations*, wished to emphasize that our spiritual journey needs to be in contact with the rich experience of Fr. Dehon and his teaching method.

All of us in various ways are personally engaged in a course that spiritually and practically offers an important response to the question of the ultimate meaning of human existence. To assist an educator to design his/her personal profile, we need to pay attention to three items: memory, narrative, and compassion.

Memory puts us in contact with the original charism and experience of Fr. Dehon. It takes on the burden of a trust. Such a trust becomes 'risky' because it requires involvement and a readiness to allow transformation.

So that memory is not weakened, **narrative** is necessary. This way spirituality acquires life. It becomes the reality that serves as a bridge between the foundational story told and the telling community. Young people discover the meaning of celebrating, witnessing, and living out their salvation.

The word kept in memory and put into practice by the teacher's narrative that gives witness, leads to **compassion**. For compassion demands a change in seeing, a new vision of God

and the world. A spirituality does not merely show its structure but its moving force as well because it produces a change of outlook, of attitude, and of perspective.

2. Dehonian Educational Proposal¹

“To educate a Christian is not merely to provide him/her with concepts of human sciences that enable him to establish a place in life [. . .]. Above all else it means to create in him/her a noble and great character, responsive preferences, for strengthening virtues.

It means growing in him/her a faith that opens up the mind to the invisible world, a hope that energizes the heart onto the happiness that duly awaits it and a love that turns a person toward God in the midst of the cold shadows of life”.²

Faithful to the spirit of Fr. Dehon, our Founder, and to the mission he desired for our Institute, we need to look upon educational activity as a privileged setting for evangelizing activity. Dehonian education is marked by the effort to go out to listen to young people and observe the method of: observe, judge, and act.

Thus, in order that our educational settings become authentic places for evangelization and fulfill what it means to be Dehonian, we need to promote the attitudes that flow from these expressions: “**Ecce venio**”, “**Sint Unum**”, and “**Adveniat Regnum Tuum**”.

***Ecce Venio/Ecce Ancilla** – Behold I come to do your will/Behold the handmaid of the Lord.*

“Ecce venio/Ecce Ancilla” tell us that we have come to understand the unmerited generosity of God’s love; it urges us toward dispositions of availability toward the weakest, toward generosity, self-giving, so as to be open and attentive to the needs of others as a response to God’s love. We are helped to promote activity that is generative.

Thus, the Dehonian Educational Proposal:

- Involves the acceptance of one’s body. In the process of growing more human, each person can grow and become complete in his/her own corporality (L. Dehon, *Oeuvres Sociales IV*, 277).
- Implies the complete development of the person, in his/her physical, psychological, and spiritual abilities (L. Dehon, *Oeuvres Sociales IV*, 277-278).
- Includes the religious dimension of education. It introduces the person to the life of faith and the sacraments, to the whole dimension of celebrations of faith. It invites the person to follow the Lord (L. Dehon, *Oeuvres Sociales IV*, 278).

¹ The members of the VIIIth General Conference endorsed a Dehonian educational proposal that originated with the meeting at Salamanca (July 2001) and was developed over the intervening years.

²L. DEHON, *OSC IV*, 278.

- Acknowledges human weakness, its woundedness and its failures, a human reality that can lead to a profound encounter between God and man, and thus work out for man's salvation (L. Dehon, *Oeuvres Sociales* IV, 278).
- Aims at committed authentic Christians and not merely educated people (L. Dehon, *Oeuvres Sociales*, IV, 278-279).
- Places high value on quality training. It educates the senses, develops intelligence, invites one to be creative and develop the heart. Young people shall be moved to make their obvious talents fruitful, to grow in keeping with their abilities and possess the consciousness that these talents do not belong to them alone but should be fruitful and put at the service of other people (L. Dehon, *Oeuvres Sociales* IV, 277-278, 361).

Sint Unum – That all be one

Jesus' prayer for unity became dear to Fr. Dehon who makes reference to the values of fraternity, communion, cordiality, family spirit, sharing with others, reconciliation, readiness to accept and be open to others, all of which make common life one of the most important bases for human life and help us set in motion responsible activities.

Thus, the Dehonian Educational Proposal:

- Involves the heart as a mystical symbol of God's incarnations, an event that stimulates solidarity with others and for others on the one hand and tends toward union with God as the greatest thing that can take place in a human life on the other (L. Dehon, *Oeuvres Sociales* IV, 277-278; idem. I, 3).
- Requires a spirit of community. The communal celebration of feasts of saints, of jubilees, and other special occasions create bonds of communion and a sense of belonging (H. Dorresteyn, *Leven en persoonlijkheid van Pater Dehon*, Maastricht 1949, 75-76).
- Promotes love for the church which goes hand in hand in work for religious and priestly vocations (L. Dehon, *Oeuvres Sociales* IV, 270-273, 278).
- Encourages common efforts among religious and lay Dehonians. Together they take on educational work to serve youth and become willing to work responsibly at their respective tasks.
- Values new methods and means of communication as ways of mutual understanding among peoples and proclamation of the gospel (L. Dehon, *Oeuvres Sociales*, II, 195 ff.)
- Teaches hospitality and readiness to welcome people (Friendly Assn. of Alumni Students of St. John's School, Aug. 8, 1897, pp. 24-26; L. Dehon, *Voyage Around the World*.)

Adveniat Regnum Tuum – Thy kingdom come

This part of the Our Father invites us to develop attitudes that encourage activities and commitments of individuals and communities that enable gospel values to be effective here

and now. A pursuit of the fullness of a life of love according to the Heart of the Father allows it to be present in concrete social activity, in work for Justice and Peace, in reparative action as a manifestation of our solidarity with people, in work that becomes more humane from a double perspective: knowledge-action, contemplation-action. We desire an education as good citizens that leads to changes in the building up of a new world, in one's own life, and in disseminating the social teaching of the church.

Thus, the Dehonian Educational Proposal:

- Opts for an integral formation of young people according to a Christian understanding of man, his life, and the world, and prepares him/her for future involvement in the transformation and improvement of society (L. Dehon, *Oeuvres Sociales IV*, 270-271).
- Has a missionary spirit. He/She passes on the gospel message to others through dialog (L. Dehon, *Oeuvres Sociales IV*, 278-279).
- Conducts him/herself in such a way that every instructive activity becomes an encounter between faith and culture (L. Dehon, *Oeuvres Social IV*, 273).
- Teaches personal responsibility in the sense of performing one's duty and toward taking on responsibility both in society and in the church (L. Dehon, *Oeuvres Sociales IV*, 361).
- Pursues salvation in society by making use of Christian associations. He supports unions and charitable witness proceeding from a gospel spirit (J. Haas, *P. Leo Dehon, Sein soziales Wirken, Sein Sühnen*, Freiburg 1955, 66).
- Actively works for the Kingdom of God *in souls and in society*. He aspires to a sense of justice in his personal dealings, in social political and economic structures (L. Dehon, *Oeuvres Sociales I*, 3 and V-1, IX).

3. The Dehonian Teacher

Dehonians work in a variety of settings and during the course of the conference we duly considered parishes, schools/universities, and the world of the media. Consequently, certain matters came to the fore that we wish to emphasize with some urgency for suitable consideration in our task as educators.

3.1 Parishes

A Dehonian parish community that educates and is educated is always attentive to what happens in its daily life so as to welcome any signs of God's presence. It believes in the positive worth of young people and it does not allow their weakness and instability to prevent dialog from entering into and verifying their human and religious experiences.

A. Urgent Matters

- There is an urgent need to welcome young people into a place that reflects communion and welcome. To accomplish this it is necessary for Dehonians to go out to meet young people "by leaving their sacristies".

- Equally, it is necessary to keep in mind that there be integration among various existing parish youth groups to promote perseverance and active participation.

B. *Strategies – Actions*

- Have a quality program that invites participation
- Be open to associations and movements within the parishes themselves
- Continue to hold meetings of young Dehonians (youth and vocations ministry) in all our entities and to share international events
- Create a worldwide network of young people with coordination at the general level together with delegates from entities with youth and vocations ministries
- Promote continuing formation within the parishes

3.2 *Schools/Universities/Educational Settings*

Education of young adults toward some future place in the world of work and vocation is neither the simple creation of a single moment nor the natural result of some socially mysterious process; it is rather a web of a series of factors of which the primary one is the freedom of the person. When responsibly used, it leads to the future. The educator's duty is to promote freedom and self-reliance.

A. *Urgent Matters*

- Develop a Dehonian pedagogy that leads to a holistic formation of the person within the school or university setting.
- Constantly accompany and be present to young people who attend our academic centers
- Along the lines of international openness, develop a common pastoral plan.

B. *Strategies – Actions*

- Coordinate a network among our educational institutions and promote the theme: "Educare" which was so dear to our Founder.
- The general administration should assign a councilor or another religious to coordinate the activity of *educare* at the general level.
- Create a group of Dehonians with expertise in holistic formation and let them be available to offer services in other contexts.
- Continue to hold international meetings of Dehonian educators and directors of educational sectors.
- Give attention to promoting and developing the teaching vocation in social as well as religious settings.

3.3 *Mass Media*

The educational setting for the Dehonian charism can serve as a mediator between gospel values and the current socio-cultural context.

A. Urgent Matters

- We see the need for an awareness of the internet and new technologies and for making use of them because they are not merely a means of contact but of meeting.
- Our Dehonian presence is required in media such as radio, TV, and social networks.

B. Strategies – Actions

- Provide opportunities for training and formation on how to convey information.
- Utilize the internet to exchange content among entities.
- Sensitize adults to the use of the social media.

3.4 Other Settings

The need for witness is very important in human experience and in faith. A true teacher-witness observing a young person's heart expand senses that the future is giving him/her space, that his/her horizons are widening and deepening, and that walking down a road is both possible and necessary.

For us Dehonians, the excluded and forgotten of society are a priority and it is for this reason that we focus our attention on marginal people, migrants, the lost, and children of the streets... It is in this sense that we want to guarantee a professional and charismatic approach by creating space with them and being present there where they are.

Our educational settings also wish to ensure that families are part of the process, visiting them to learn what their reality is like and drawing suitably close to them; all should be enriched by moments of true sharing and celebration of what is important in their lives.

Current history tells us that there has been a lack of attention for those who are abused. Rules are needed to attempt to prevent abuse in the future. There should be guaranteed respect for victims and appropriate treatment for the aggressors.

To Educate Today

Our educational proposal requires us to contemplate Christ as the perfect teacher and model for fulfilled humanity. All that we have reflected upon can well serve us as teachers, and more readily, the example and person of Christ can do so too. What is key is the personal relationship we have with Him and with his presence in the church and consequently the relationship between our own humanity and his very person.

Christ, sole teacher of mankind, help us act in such a way *"That they may have life in abundance"* (John 10:10).