



GENERAL SUPERIOR
CONGREGATION OF THE
PRIESTS OF THE SACRED HEART
Dehonians

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Rome, 12 December 2013

To: Provincial, Regional, District Superiors

Christmas Letter 2013

Jesus Christ is born in each of our separate realities

Christmas returns; returns with its light, returns announced by many little signs that are designed to enrich our provinces, regions, and entities. Returns to give direction, to astonish and to help us to be open to hope.

Jesus Christ was born bringing joy, present with the universal church during its important moments. *Pope Benedict XVI* stepped down in a gesture of profound humility. This path has been continued by *Pope Francis*. The two popes, in different ways, have told us that without a constant relationship with God our mission becomes just a job. The risk of activism, of trusting too much in structures, is always lurking. The more that the mission calls us to go to the outer reaches of our existence the more the heart must be united to that of Christ, full of mercy and love. It is here that Jesus Christ is born.

He was born in the many, even historical, meetings we shared this year. From January 10-15, *19 Dehonian bishops* met with the general administration of the congregation to reflect on how to live the Dehonian charism in episcopal ministry, and how the congregation can collaborate with the local church.

On April 8, the Solemnity of the Annunciation of the Lord, we began *a meeting of the directors of our SCJ scholasticates*. This ran through April 13 at the General Curia in Rome. The meeting had multiple objectives: to study the new *Ratio formationis Generalis*; to identify commonalities in our initial formation programs: spirituality, charism, internationality, training in economic and social engagement; and moreover, to build a spirit of fraternity and collaboration among our formators in view of international collaboration in our scholasticates.

From June 17-20 the General Curia hosted *the secretaries of our various entities*. We stressed the fact that the secretaries are an important instrument in the service of mission and communion of the congregation. Our work is built around the important role secretaries have in the preparation of agendas for council meetings, and in regards to assemblies and chapters, not as a technical service, but as an expression of spirituality and mission which is expressed

in the “Sint Unum” dear to the founder. The “Secretaries Handbook” was presented at the meeting, which is an invaluable tool for the secretaries’ work.

In Rio de Janeiro in June *the World Youth Days* brought together a great number of youth. In the days previous to the event our community in Brazil hosted many young people coming from our entities who came to be strengthened in the Dehonian spirit

In September we began *the formators’ course*. There are 14 confreres from 11 entities deepening their understanding of our spirituality in order to help young people discover and discern God’s call in their own lives.

To continue to give birth to Jesus Christ and His Kingdom, from November 3-9 we had the meeting of the *major superiors*. The work of the gathering focused on developing guidelines for the preparation of the XXIII General Chapter that will be held from May 16 to June 6, 2015. The introduction to our work reminded us of the need for creativity, to be prophets that discern, poets that sing the word, and laborers building a new reality. In the first days of this month of December, from the 6th to the 8th, *the Preparatory Committee of the XXIII General Chapter* met in Rome. During this first gathering they set forward the path that the Congregation will walk in preparation of the Chapter, which will be convoked at the end of the year.

Christ was born when we faced challenges at the continental level. This year *Africa* held its *Continental Conference*. It strengthened the sense of belonging and gave new impetus to the desire to enhance the Dehonian presence through shared meetings and collaboration, sharing formational expertise at the entity level, finding concrete paths toward collaboration.

The leap to *North America* was not small, and concerns there are equally important. In particular, we focused on lifestyle issues, especially in regards to how we live the vow of poverty in the context of North America. How do we give value to religious life in that context, renew community life and provide opportunities for sharing with each other and welcoming confreres from other entities?

The Continental Conference in *Latin America* helped to raise awareness and sensitivity toward the various projects of the continent and discuss how to implement them in new ways. We reflected openly, identifying challenges, both in society and in the congregation. In addition, we discussed possibilities for promoting collaboration between the entities in structure, formation and mission.

Jesus Christ was born when we were thankful, remembering years of service and commitment because his kingdom comes. Remembrance for those who have experienced a piece of these stories is not without meaning, engaging the full attention and interest of mind and heart. The Province of *Cameroon* (CMR) celebrated 100 years of the Dehonian presence. The District of *Austria-Croatia* (ACR) recalled 100 years of SCJ presence in Vienna. South America celebrated 120 years of presence and 50 years as a Province in *Brazil-Recife* (BRE) and the 30th anniversary of the establishment of the province of *Argentina* (ARG) with its dependent District of *Uruguay* (URU).

The list of thanks extends to our newest initiatives. On August 12, *Vietnam* (VIE) was established as a district; September 21, *Ecuador* (ECU) took on the configuration of a district. These are entities that are young and full of fresh, new energy for the future of the congregation.

Jesus Christ was born in new vocations. In the past year there were *41 novices*, *52 first professions* and *22 new priests*. For all these we say our thanks to the Lord of history who never stops thinking about the good of his kingdom.

A fresh breeze has come to many of our *entities through new administrations*. The entire congregation gives thanks for the service that so many brothers carry out for many. Chile (CHI) and Madagascar (MAD) welcomed new administrations on January 1, 2013; Poland (POL) has had a new council since January 15; January 18 was the start of the new administration in Venezuela (VEN); in the summer, on July 15, we had new administrations in Indonesia (INA), in the Provinces of the United States (USA) and Germany (GER) on August 1. Vietnam (VIE) and Uruguay (URU) began new administrations on August 12, South Africa (RSA) on August 30, and Argentina (ARG) on November 1.

Jesus Christ was born amidst the unexpected. On February 1, the German Province realized, after almost 20 years, the dream of returning to *Berlin*. A few years ago the return to Berlin was not even imaginable, a trek into the heart of the most de-Christianized part of Germany. Also in *Toronto*, Canada, the presence of SCJs from other entities gave new visibility to internationality but also to a new life through mutual collaboration. In the meantime, the first steps were made to build an international community in *London*.

On May 6 the Holy See announced the appointment of *Fr. Zolile Peter Mpambani* as bishop of the small Diocese of Kokstad, near Durban, South Africa. It is a good sign for the Dehonian presence in that part of the world, an invitation to be in communion with the universal Church.

Solidarity has never been lacking in our congregation, but it becomes even more evident during extraordinary events where we see how the sense of justice and love for others becomes concrete. *The typhoon in the Philippines* developed a chain of solidarity in such a way that brings honor to our congregation, and says how great it is to work for the kingdom of God.

Christ Jesus was met by our *34 brothers who died this year*. We entrust them all to his mercy and join in this remembrance Cardinal Stanislaw Nagy, SCJ, cardinal-deacon of Santa Maria della Scala. In the telegram of condolence to Cardinal Stanislaw Dziwisz, Archbishop of Krakow (Poland), Pope Francis recalled “with gratitude his fruitful collaboration, mutual respect and cordial friendship with Blessed John Paul II, as well as his intense ecumenical activity.”

During this time we reflect on the Lord who is born in all of these realities, and we affirm the true meaning of Christmas. We do not look at these events in isolation but with the language of our spirituality and the Good News that affects all of humanity. The birth of Jesus is the link, the embrace of justice and truth, a fruitful encounter between heaven and earth, filled with hope and the promise of peace and a full life.

We wish each one of you a Blessed Christmas and a New Year 2014 filled with blessings, trusting that the Spirit of the Lord will assist us in the Chapters of the different entities in preparation of the XXIII General Chapter in 2015.

Fr. José Ornelas Carvalho
Superior general
and his Council