

**Dong-Hanh
Vietnamese Companions of Christ**

Five-year Action Plan

**Approved at the Annual Year-End Gathering
New Orleans, LA
December 27 - 31, 1997**

Purpose:

- To better understand our calling and mission.
- To become "one mind and heart" in our direction of service.

The document contains four areas:

1. Dong-Hanh Service Body, including the Executive Council (ExCo), Regional and Local Executive Groups

- Promote a stronger sense of belonging to Dong-Hanh and an understanding of its identity.
- Encourage members of the ExCo to work together on different projects; call upon the ExCo to foster better relations with the local groups.
- Use the Dong-Hanh newsletter more effectively as a means to communicate to our members.
- Communicate our financial needs better.
- Reach out to the poor.
- Improve and strengthen our prayer life and faith.

2. Formation and Research

- Promote the CLC way of life and its stages.
- Encourage the desire among themselves to engage further in the CLC way of life.
- Recognize the need for discernment on how to do service according to Ignatian criteria.
- Make available the means for learning the CLC way of life.

3. Youth Ministry

- Know and understand who they are.
- Accept the youth as they are.
- Have a close relationship with Christ.

4. Family Ministry

- Promote more understanding and acceptance of the CLC way of life.
- Recognize family as the highest priority of the couples.
- Re-discover Jesus' presence in our family life so that we can better love and raise our children.
- Prepare couples for marital life.

I. Dong-Hanh Service Body: ExCo, Regional and Local Executive Groups

Our ideal and working spirit: With a desire to serve our entire Dong-Hanh (DH) community more effectively in the new organizational structure and in the spirit of teamwork, the Executive Council (ExCo) of Dong-Hanh would like to propose the following lines of action for the coming years.

1. Promote a stronger sense of belonging to Dong-Hanh and an understanding of its identity.

Critical Situation: Some of the local groups have been journeying with DH for many years but still have not understood the purpose of Dong-Hanh and its main tasks. As a result,

- the local groups hardly participate in the activities or projects proposed by the ExCo;
- members of the local groups have no idea of where the DH community is going;
- members of the local groups are confused about their goals, divided among themselves, and may eventually leave Dong-Hanh.

Lines of Action: The ExCo, with cooperation of the regional and local leaders, will utilize all available means of communication, such as gatherings, newsletter and publications, e-mails, web sites, etc., to share and channel information about our goals and identity to the local groups.

Purpose: Promote CLC's goals and identity to the whole Dong-Hanh community.

2. Encourage members of the ExCo to work together on different projects; call upon the ExCo to foster better relations with the local groups.

Critical Situation: Although the new organizational structure has allowed us to work together more effectively, members of the ExCo still need to contact and communicate with one another and with the membership at large more often. The ExCo also needs to visit the local groups more frequently; otherwise, it could lead to the following situation:

- active ExCo members will get burned out without the support of the large body, and other local members will feel left out if they do not have the chance to get involved;
- discrimination and disunity may arise;
- members of the local groups may feel distant and indifferent about what's going on in Dong-Hanh.

Lines of Action: After each gathering in the region or the completion of a major project by a committee, there should be an evaluation to share with one another the grace and experience received in a true spirit of understanding and constructive criticism. Members of the ExCo should also work together by becoming engaged in different projects in order to understand and support one another more.

Purpose: To build up the spirit of teamwork throughout the entire Dong-Hanh community.

3. Use the Dong-Hanh newsletter more effectively as a means to communicate to our members.

Critical Situation: As of today, the Dong-Hanh newsletter has not been an effective means for the ExCo to keep members in-sync on the identity and goal of the entire Dong-Hanh community; neither has it been a source of formation materials for local groups; thus,

- the local groups do not feel the need of the newsletter;
- the local groups are not aware of the activities and other news in Dong-Hanh;
- the local groups do not contribute much in writings or in financial support to the newsletter;
- the newsletter itself eventually becomes monotonous since it only contains personal sharings;

Lines of action:

1. Form a team of contributing editors to help communicate the direction and agenda of the entire Dong-Hanh community to the local groups, and also to improve the contents of the newsletter.
2. Contact with the local groups asking them to write and share about their local activities.

Purpose: To make the Dong-Hanh newsletter become a more effective means to help the local groups to keep informed about the entire Dong-Hanh community. For the Dong-Hanh newsletter to become a bridge, building connections among all local groups.

4. Communicate our financial needs better.

Critical Situation: Though many have been responding very generously, the majority of the Dong-Hanh community still have not fully grasped our financial needs; thus, they do not fully participate in the fund-raising activities of DH. As a result, Dong-Hanh is financially weak and may not continue to be able:

- to offer training workshops, Spiritual Exercises, and other retreats,
- to publish the Dong-Hanh newsletter,
- to maintain the Internet server for communication,
- to share with the Jesuit provinces some expenses of the ecclesiastical assistant.

Lines of Action:

1. Short-term: through the help of the regional and local leaders, and other means of communication, i.e., newsletter, Internet, etc., we need to state clearly the purpose of our fund-raising, report regularly concerning the on-going activities of our fund raising committee.
2. Long-term: once members in the local groups fully understand the reasons why we need their financial support and what their contributions enable us to do, they will be more willing to contribute. They will soon appreciate fund-raising as part of their responsibility.

Purpose: To provide Dong-Hanh the necessary financial means to continue its services.

5. Reach out to the poor.

Critical Situation: Only a few individuals and local groups of Dong-Hanh have been engaged in reaching out to the poor. This engagement with the poor needs to be promoted more earnestly and widely in Dong-Hanh at large; otherwise, the Dong-Hanh community could be misunderstood as lacking an apostolic thrust, being insulated from the poor, and labeled as a "closed and inwardly-focused" group.

Lines of Action: Encourage individual members and local groups to make concrete efforts to reach out to the poor. In the near future, the local groups or even the whole Dong-Hanh community could consider making a long-term commitment to work with the poor.

Purpose: To provide spiritual support to and solidarity with the poor, the sick, the suffering, etc., and to live the Gospel more authentically.

6. Improve and strengthen our prayer life and faith.

Critical Situation: Most members of the local groups have fostered a deeper spiritual life, and developed strong bonding with one another. We see an urgent need, however, to encourage scripture and theology study among our members in order to improve and strengthen our faith and prayer life. Otherwise, complacency may lead us to an undesirable situation, in which,

- the local groups will remain static and do not grow further;
- the local groups will eventually lose their identity.

We are also keenly aware of a situation, in which only one or two members are able to go for training and study, and then go home trying to educate the rest! We want to avoid this situation because it may lead to divisions within the group.

Lines of action: Dong-Hanh should continue to provide workshops and resources for formation training, theological study, and create more opportunities for making the Spiritual Exercises, etc., as well as encourage the members of local groups to make retreats together as a group.

Purpose: To deepen the spiritual and faith life of our members, promote community, and through these means, reaffirm the identity of the Dong-Hanh community.

II. Formation and Research

Our ideal and working spirit: Being aware of our human limitations, we are grateful to be called to share in Christ's mission. With the help of the Holy Spirit as our source of Strength, Hope, and Wisdom, we, the formation and research team, would like to propose the following lines of action for the coming years to respond to the rising needs of formation in Dong-Hanh.

1. Promote the CLC way of life and its stages.

Critical Situation: The majority of local groups are made up of those who encountered Jesus and one another in one of the weekend retreats sponsored by local DH members. Though the groups were formed quite quickly at the beginning, members lack understanding of the group's identity, the CLC charism, their relationship with the CLC community at large, and their need for on-going training. All of these issues eventually cause the group to stop growing, or move in circles, or even falter.

Other difficulties also appear in such groups. They stay isolated and do not want to connect with other groups either at the local or the national level. In addition, people who bear responsibility in the group get burned out due to overwork.

The training workshops, however, have to meet the needs of members at various stages of development; otherwise, members will be unable to absorb the material, get frustrated, and become discouraged.

As a result of the problems listed above, local groups have not yielded much fruit and the entire Dong-Hanh has not been able to advance for the greater glory of God.

Lines of Action: We ought to take advantage of all available resources to introduce the CLC charism to local groups. For example, by

- organizing training workshops according to the particular needs and growth levels of the local groups.
- providing materials on the CLC way of life and explaining its road map to members.
- encouraging local members to share their lived experience in the CLC way of life in the newsletter and on the Internet.
- helping to develop bonding among members of local groups and the CLC community at large through annual gatherings, general assemblies, etc.

Purpose: To help members grow and understand better the CLC charism.

2. Encourage the desire among themselves to engage further in the CLC way of life.

Critical Situation: There are many different levels of commitment among the members in local groups. Some come to the group only to find friendship and recreation; some seek spiritual support for themselves; some wish to be re-energized and get nourishment in order to serve other groups. At the same time, there are some who desire to engage further in the CLC way of life. This desire is, however, hindered by these differences. As a result, the various groups cannot become more fully incorporated into the DH way of life, and go through a cycle of ups and downs.

Lines of Action:

1. Give a clear orientation on the goal and purpose of CLC to candidates before they join the group.
2. Invite and encourage all active members to make 5-8 day retreats rather than just weekend retreats, attend formation workshops and other gatherings in Dong-Hanh.
3. Remind those who desire to go further in imitating Christ, to be patient with their group, to be humble and willing to serve the other members.

Purpose: To help members in the group discover and respond to God's call to become more incorporated in the DH way of life.

3. Recognize the need for discernment on how to do service according to Ignatian criteria.

Critical Situation:

1. Numbers of local groups and their members have good will and enthusiasm to engage in apostolic works, but do not know how to discern their works properly according to Ignatian criteria, thus,
 - often it appears as if groups are proceeding according to their own perceptions rather than by the movement of the Spirit;
 - due to lack of discernment their service often brings harm and conflict to the local parish and their own families.
2. Lack of understanding and communication between local groups and parish priests could lead to the following situations:
 - the local group is not well received in the parish;
 - their contributions to the parish life are not as effective as it could be.

Lines of Action:

1. Provide training workshops to help members and groups learn how to discern their apostolic call and how to respond to it appropriately.
2. Promote local groups as well as the entire Dong-Hanh community to establish good public relations with the local priests and parishes.
3. Encourage local groups and their members to actively participate in parish activities.

Purpose: To make our service more effective, and build good rapport with priests, religious people, and the people of God in the local church.

4. Make available the means for learning the CLC way of life.

Critical Situation: Those who desire to engage further in our way of life do not have the necessary means, such as

spiritual direction, 5-8 day SpEx retreats, and formation training, available for them at the local level. Thus, they become easily discouraged.

Lines of Action:

1. DH needs to reach out and search for available resources in local areas or nearby cities, and inform the members about those resources. For example, if we know any religious or lay people in the local area who have made the full SpEx retreat and have engaged in spiritual direction, we can invite them to share their gifts with the local DH members.
2. Dong-Hanh also needs to look among its members in local areas for those who have the desire and gifts to engage in the ministry of the SpEx and spiritual direction, and provide them the necessary training.

Purpose: Provide the means for further growth and make available opportunities for enrichment and training to members who thirst for more.

III. Youth Ministry

Our ideal and working spirit: With a desire to help youth grow more in God's love and respond to this love generously, we, the youth ministry team, would like to suggest the following lines of action for the coming years.

1. Know and understand who they are.

Critical Situation: Many of the youth today do not feel they belong to a group or a parish community in which they can enjoy true friendship, learn more about human values, and exercise their gifts. Hence, youth go out and look for belonging and acceptance from their peers and friends, who may lead them astray.

Lines of Action:

1. Assist and encourage youth to organize activities, such as picnics, sports, and community services, which help build friendship and develop relationship skills in open communication, teamwork, dialogue, and peer support.
2. Provide adequate formation training for their guides, who are chosen from among youth themselves. Invite them to join and help out in youth retreats, e.g., Come & See, Ephata, etc.

Purpose: To create a safe and spiritual environment for youth to hang around, and prepare them to meet the challenges of the next millennium.

2. Accept the youth as they are.

Critical Situation: Many Vietnamese youth living in North America today are having identity crises due to the encounter of two different - and contradictory at times - cultures. As a result, youth are easily pressured into following the "trends" which sometimes lead to bad and wrong choices in life.

Lines of Action: Create opportunities for youth and their parents to meet, interact, and foster a good parent-child relationship. Such activities can be family recreation nights, local community service projects, or group meetings at different members' house, so that parents can get to know their children's friends in the group better.

Purpose: To breakdown the wall and nourish a true understanding between parents and youth today.

3. Have a close relationship with Christ.

Critical Situation: In today's society, it is difficult for youth to grasp a true and loving image of God. Thus, their

faith does not grow strongly and maturely in relationship with God, and can easily drift away later in life.

Lines of Action: Help youth to be more aware of God's presence in their daily life by means of the SpEx retreats, the groups, a daily examen, etc. If possible, we should have some gatherings in Dong-Hanh that are devoted to youth only.

Purpose: To help youth discover the God of Love and strengthen their relationship with God through their own personal experiences.

IV. Family Ministry

Our ideal and working spirit: With a desire to use Ignatian Spirituality to assist families to grow in holiness and happiness in family life, to discern God's will, to live the CLC way of life before and after marriage, and to become an apostolic community, we, the family ministry team, would like to propose the following lines of action for the coming years.

1. Promote more understanding and acceptance of the CLC way of life.

Critical Situation: Though quite a few of our members stopped their involvement in Dong-Hanh shortly after getting married, there are many who still continue to choose Dong-Hanh as their way of life. This life style, however, is often not supported by their peers, they feel lonely and eventually leave the community.

Lines of Action: Help our members to understand more clearly the CLC way of life by:

1. Offering workshop on CLC Charism,
2. Encouraging families that have chosen the CLC way of life and are currently growing in it to share their experience in the Dong-Hanh newsletter,
3. Creating opportunities for families in Dong-Hanh to meet and support each others.

Purpose: To help married couples understand more thoroughly the CLC way of life, so that, by choosing it, they can enrich their family life.

2. Recognize family as the highest priority of the couples.

Critical Situation: Many couples in Dong-Hanh are overly zealous in their commitments with DH and local parishes, and at times, lacking in the fulfillment of their family responsibilities. That results in unhappiness and resentment from other family members towards Dong-Hanh, and worst of all, the breaking up of the family itself.

Lines of Action: Create opportunities for family members in Dong-Hanh to learn the skill of discernment to balance their apostolic work and family life. For example, DH can offer a workshop or retreat that focuses on the communal discernment process, in which the whole group can help individuals look at the level of his/her commitment at a deeper level.

Purpose: To remind ourselves to keep our apostolic work and family life in balance.

3. Re-discover Jesus' presence in our family life so that we can better love and raise our children.

Critical Situation: Some of our young Catholic couples do not take time to discern and learn God's will for them. They tend to work hard, have a busy schedule, and do not spend enough time with their children. The children, in turn, are not prepared well for a spiritual life and don't have a loving image of God. They, at times, feel lonely and detached from their own family. Family peace and harmony eventually disappear.

Lines of action: Promote programs that help families to get to know Jesus more intimately, and to learn more about parenting in today's world, e.g., offering SpEx that are devoted to families, seminars on family issues, picnics and other outings for families.

Purpose: To help families experience Jesus more deeply and share that experience together. To become more intimate with Jesus, and learn to love each other like Jesus. To help mend the broken relationships, heal the suffering in the family, and bring the true love of God back in family life.

4. Prepare couples for marital life.

Critical Situation: Some couples before getting married are not well prepared for their marital life in the Church.

Lines of Action: Organize various activities to help premarital couples in both psychological and spiritual preparation . For example,

1. Be involved in their engaged-encounter program in the parish;
2. Organize short meetings in which couples can share real life experiences on marital life;
3. Promote on Dong-Hanh newsletter topics that help prepare for marital life;
4. Organize retreats that help young people discern for vocation, especially to a marital life.

Purpose: To help the couples fully understand the sacrament of matrimony before making the commitment.