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Efforts to Promote Social Justice in the English Canadian Region of Holy Cross (1947-2017)

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Some preliminary remarks: This is not an exercise in academic history. There are few documents and many of the first-hand witnesses of the beginnings are no longer with us. Nor did I have access to our archives while preparing this document, though I have a fair idea of what is there. Also, I did not drive a firm wedge between charity and social justice there is no justice without charity though charity here needs to be understood as love that recognizes and constitutes the other as equal. In this sense, charity is a polar opposite to paternalism. Finally, while I have tried to include some significant examples of justice work, my account is far from exhaustive.

The story begins in the mid-1940's. The most extensive document about the history of our group is The English Canadian Province of HOLY CROSS, 1943-1984: A Chronicle, written by Fr. Robert McInroy, undated but circulated around 1985. It is impossible to speak of the English Canadian Region's implication with social justice without looking into the social context in which the group was formed. The first members were largely from the Maritimes (New Brunswick in particular, but also other maritime provinces. Several worked with the Acadians in Memramcook, outside Moncton, New Brunswick. Most had gone through their formation in Montreal. Quebec, at that time, was politically and economically dominated by the English. Montreal's public language was English and the French were looked down upon. A small minority of English-speaking priests in a largely Francophone Province had little chance of exercising any initiative even though they were appreciated. As a result, they remained largely located in New Brunswick, in Acadian territory. New Brunswick was and still is divided geographically between Acadian and English (British Loyalist) territories. Nevertheless, the Acadians got along very well with the Holy Cross English-speaking priests.

The move to form an English Canadian Holy Cross group (1943) opened the door for the English-speaking Maritimers to consider what could be done, not only in the Maritimes, but further to the West, particularly in Ontario and eventually in Alberta. Parishes were undertaken in Montreal and Halifax. The group continued to teach English-language students at the College in Memramcook, N.B. which would eventually become the University of Moncton and led the EC Province to set up on the campus of St. Thomas University in Fredericton in the 1960's. This University prepares future teachers and social workers, above all, for New Brunswick. With the end of the reign of Prime Minister Duplessis in Quebec, and the period of the Quiet Revolution beginning in 1964, there were shifts. In Quebec, the French-speaking took charge of their territory. It was an important political, economic and cultural shift. The English were dethroned from their political and economic power. However, the movement for an independent Quebec caused some consternation outside its borders. The English Canadian Province largely shared the view that the so-called "separatist" movement was dangerous and this led some to distrust of developments. So, from the start our group found itself dealing with one of the most important social justice issues shaping Canada and Quebec. Current efforts in 2019 to reunite our two groups follows in that trajectory.

At that time, before 1970, the "option for the poor," which has come to symbolize the work for social justice in the Church, was not necessarily understood or even well received in our circle. There was a slow process of awareness and acceptance that grew through the years. The impact of Vatican II and the arrival of newly ordained priests in that period was decisive.

Notre Dame College School (1947), Welland, Ontario

One of the earliest projects undertaken by the new Vice-Province was a venture into the world of Toronto. Initially Cardinal McGuigan offered an existing school in east Toronto, Neil McNeil. However, there were staffing difficulties, so the Cardinal asked if the Fathers would be willing to go to an outpost at the edge of the diocese: Welland, a small city near the eastern end of the Niagara Peninsula. This meant moving into territory not known by the members at that time and taking on responsibility in a very special social context that, be it said, also led to quite a few vocations. Welland was an industrial city with a large francophone presence (30% - mostly from Quebec) and with immigrants from post-war Europe.

As educators in the faith we helped second generation refugees and immigrants to become integrated into the Canadian Church and society. Ours was the first co-ed Catholic high school in the area: Notre Dame College School (NDCS) – with partial government support. A seed of this school had existed as “Grey Gables,” operated by the School Sisters of Notre Dame. The educational ministry by the Province at NDCS was initially in the Archdiocese of Toronto. By 1958, when the Diocese of St. Catharines was formed, our Province became a significant partner in Catholic secondary school education in the Lincoln and Welland County Separate School Boards by eventually taking the leadership in creating three other Catholic high schools in the diocese.

Beginning in 1970, a work of justice education and concrete support to the marginalized became a part of the curriculum at Notre Dame College School in Welland. This began as a starvathon: 24 hours without food but accompanied by education about conditions in the “third world.” Fr. Jim Mulligan was, from the beginning, a guiding light. Five years later the format was changed to a pilgrimage or march and occupied the students’ attention during an entire month each Fall. This format garnered a large public awareness and spread to several other Catholic schools. After 43 years, it has raised more than three million dollars for projects throughout the world. As time went on, justice education became an integral part of the religious education at NDCS. There were also several walks against male violence against women. The NDCS pilgrimage, promoted by CSC religious, became the model for similar pilgrimage marches at Holy Cross Secondary School, St. Paul Secondary School, and Lakeshore Catholic Secondary School. Holy Cross became a major promoter of the work of the Canadian Catholic Organization for Development and Peace (CCODP). At the same time, several sponsorships of refugees were sustained through our schools and parishes.

It is not an understatement to say that the educational work of Holy Cross, through NDCS and the other schools where we worked, helped to open public opinion in the Diocese of St. Catharines to social justice.

Parallel to all this was the emergence of Project Hope (actively supported by Fr. Denis Warburton). It sent containers of clothing, books and other goods to islands in the Caribbean, especially in collaboration with the Sisters of Holy Cross in Haiti.

Fr. Gerry Cormier, who for ten years worked with the Sisters of Holy Cross to build up the library of Regina Assumpta College in Cap Haitienne, also helped youth find work. In Dominica, Fr. Lloyd Bechamp promoted a small pottery-making industry with prisoners to support them financially, and Br. Ronald Rumbolt ministers by organizing and distributing shipments of basic items to the elderly and poor.

From 1984-1990 Frank Wagner would enlarge our impact in the Niagara area as chaplain and lecturer in the Faculty of Education at Brock University in St. Catharines, where large numbers of our NDCS graduates studied. He became active in Tools for Peace, a program to provide tools to workers in Nicaragua after the end of the war there. Frank was also involved with the work of OPIRG (Ontario Public Interest Research Group) at Brock University in a number of social justice programs as well as promoting the Ten Days for World Development education program in the Diocese. Frank made sure that social justice themes were included in his Faculty of Education classes, as well as in several lectures given at the university by Catholic theologians for the annual Columbus Day Lecture which he started.

In 1995, when our Province assumed responsibility for St. Kevin parish in Welland and Frank became pastor, the justice and peace committee was made a priority ministry by Frank and collaborated closely with the annual campaigns of Development and Peace for international justice. At the same time the parish food bank, Out of the Cold Harvest Kitchen, was established provide meals and emergency shelter. An annual scholarship for public or Catholic secondary school graduates to take university courses oriented to social justice was established and funded by parish fundraising.

In 2004 Jim Mulligan became pastor of St. Kevin Parish, a major source of students for our school. He opened more fully the social justice orientation already there and the parish continued to be a major supporter of Development and Peace as well as anti-poverty initiatives in the city when he initiated a significant study of the social dimensions of poverty in the area.

Our schools and parishes became active supporters and partners in the various national ecumenical coalitions formed in the 1970's to work for social justice and this evolved into support for Kairos-Canada, a national ecumenical organization

coordinating social justice work for the major Churches in Canada. We also supported other social justice groups such as Citizens for Public Justice and Project Ploughshares. These ecumenical coalitions were among more than a dozen outstanding initiatives for social justice that drew the attention of Churches around the world.

All our parishes work with the poor, have food banks where people can come to get groceries for free, and all participate in local anti-poverty groups. All have sponsored refugees to Canada.

Mission outreach

To back up a bit - something I have going to have to do several times - the English-Canadians contributed significantly to the development of Holy Cross in India, working under the leadership of the French-Canadians. This included the Breens (Harold and George) and Jack Martin in the North-East, Reg McQuaid (in formation), Harry Stocks with the deaf and Young Catholic Workers, and Don Bielby, working in formation programs for our Indian confreres in the South. This was largely work with very marginalized people: indigenous, the handicapped, low-cast workers. Also, Michael McQuillan worked in Myanmar and Ghana, (1947-1970's). Because we were a small group, the presence of several of our members on other continents established a strong international awareness. During the 1980's, a series of delegations of our members went to visit places where our men were working in order to understand the political and economic challenges they were facing.

This leads me to speak of Al Mahoney who was asked, in 1973 by then Provincial Superior Robert O'Connell, to open an English Canadian mission in Latin America. After exploring several locations, he went to Chiapas, Mexico in 1974 to work with the Indigenous people there and in 1994 got caught up in the Zapatista revolution. He was eventually ousted from Mexico for his solidarity work with the Tzotzil, especially with Bishop Samuel Ruiz-Garcia. Following that Al worked with Central American refugees in Niagara before going on to spend time with the Holy Cross communities in Brazil and Peru and, at the request of Fr. Robert Morin, collaborating with the General Administration for several years on the coordination of social justice work for the Congregation.

Speaking of his years in Chiapas, Mexico, Al Mahoney says:

“I however do consider that all of my approximately 20 years work in El Bosque, Simojovel and later work in Chalchihuitan, Chiapas, Mexico as well as my four years in Peru and two years in Brazil, all had a definite strong social justice element; I was involved in the pastoral formation of catechists, health workers, community leaders and deacons where I worked. Such formation was much more accentuated in my time in Chiapas, Mexico. Our wonderful Bishop Samuel Ruiz-Garcia always maintained that as a central focus in all pastoral work with Indigenous people. The insistence on learning the local languages as part of the social justice, was an integral part of justice work.

“I was helped by the community-building and pastoral work of the 2 Mexican Sisters who formed part of our team with lay leaders, making sure that women’s participation and voice was heard and valued. That meant the slow process of integrating women catechists and community leadership in a predominantly male traditional society.

“During the last 9 years I was in Chiapas—most of it in Chalchihuitan— I was involved in my spare time in an ecumenical work of translation of the entire Bible into the Tzotzil (Mayan) language.

“In 1983 when I was home on holiday, Jim Mulligan advised me that CSC Sisters of the English- speaking group, who then had a few sisters with us in Welland and St. Catharine’s wanted to get involved with the St. Catharine’s diocese’s refugee ministry. There were two sisters: Margie Quinn, CSC and Marion Power, CSC, who wanted to volunteer, but hoped a CSC priest could accompany them. We, the Holy Cross team, were very happy to be part of this great lay initiative which as mentioned above, shortly after its beginning, became also an ecumenical venture, while continuing to be principally centred in St. Catharines parishes. Another interesting point is that it was firmly supported by the Bishops of St. Catharines, Hamilton and Toronto.”

At that point, Robert Morin, who was at that point a member of our General Administration, invited Al to help coordinate justice work for the whole Congregation.

Al continues: “My official involvement in Social Justice ministry was in the years from Sept. 2000 until after chapter of 2004, when I was asked to assume, at first, the role of assistant JPIC coordinator to Robert Morin for the Holy Cross men’s

General admin. Soon afterward, Robert had to resign from his role and I continued on for some months. After that, Jim Mulligan was named Robert Morin's replacement for JPIC concerns on the general administration. I continued as his assistant and continued to do the leg work traveling back and forth to the St. Mary's office of the combined Holy Cross administrations where I enjoyed my collaboration with Mary Turgi, CSC and her assistants."

Fredericton:

Now I need to back up once again to 1969 and return to New Brunswick. I arrived in Fredericton, after studies at the University of Toronto, fresh for my first assignment as a professor of philosophy at St. Thomas University, along with Frank Wagner who had been teaching in Dennis Morris Secondary School in St. Catharines and Joe Higgins, who had been teaching at Notre Dame College School in Welland.

At the time a group of students had made contact with a poor community in town. These people lived along Kilarney Road. One of the students approached me to accompany their efforts to engage the children in sports. We ended up supporting their efforts to convince the government of New Brunswick to build a water system to connect them to the city infrastructure. It took several years, but they got their water. In the meantime, the demonstrations and protests garnered attention and served to inspire several other projects.

During that period, Frank, who had been named director of seminarians, and I initiated a summer hostel for youth in one wing of Holy Cross House, our house of formation and student residence. This continued several years after I left and led to other projects to serve street-people and transients in the Fredericton area. As chaplain at St. Thomas University Frank Wagner collaborated in a series of initiatives of the Federal government between 1970-1984 providing summer work projects and outreach programs to local communities staffed mainly by young adults from the university.

During this same period, CHIMO (a crisis and information centre), the Fredericton Community Kitchen and the Fredericton Emergency Shelter were initiated, incorporated and operated by team of concerned Fredericton citizens including Fr. Wagner who was chair of the Fredericton Clergy Council.

Because there was no government facility, other than the New Brunswick Correctional Centre, to care for some children who were wards of the Province, Frank founded and was General Director of the Board of Fredericton Group Homes. Initially, these were supported by the bishop of St. John, the Catholic Women's League of St. Dunstan Parish, the local Holy Cross community and the Government of New Brunswick's Departments of Justice and Social Services.

In the early 1980's, as a member of the St. John Diocesan Justice Committee, Frank helped organize a project to provide seed potatoes to Nicaraguan farmers, in a cooperation with NB potato farmers. CIDA, the Diocese of St. John, CO-OP Atlantic, and the National Farmers Union of New Brunswick.

Toronto:

So now, let's turn to Toronto. In 1973 a small group of Holy Cross priests rented a house in a poor neighbourhood in East Toronto, made up of a significant percentage of people from the Atlantic provinces though today it is much more diversified. The initial project was to develop pride among the residents on our street, Grant Street. This we did over a period of several years by sponsoring a series of neighbourhood activities and engaging with the local parish, school and community centre. An ecumenical network of Christian lay communities across Toronto took form and met regularly to support one another in our efforts to serve the poor in our neighbourhoods.

Even before going to Fredericton, it had been clear to me that citizen's groups were an important piece of getting local needs brought to the attention of government and that the tools of nonviolence were essential. I learned this practically for the first time through participation in the grape boycotts organized by Cesar Chavez.

In 1979 St. Ann's Parish was offered to the community and we made an official entrance into the pastoral ministry of the Archdiocese. The first Holy Cross pastor, Andrew Morasse, made a particular effort to welcome and integrate the immigrant community and, later the gay community, which had become prominent in the neighbourhood by then. Our theology formation program operated out of the Grant Street house for several years for before moving further north in the city. Some years later from 2006-2011 "The Toronto Project"

with Frs. Frank Wagner and Don Bielby as Directors of Moreau Scholasticate was located in St Ann Parish rectory where Frank had become pastor. It was conceived to provide theological training to young religious from India with a view to their incorporation into our ministry in Canada. This led to a situation where several Holy Cross religious from India who were part of the Toronto project are now pastors of St. Ann, Holy Name and St. Joseph parishes. Along with the Native Peoples' Mission located in St. Ann Parish, they have become a large pastoral zone east of the Don River administered by Holy Cross priests from India. It is a large, densely populated area whose residents have become less economically challenged due to the gentrification of the houses even though there are still pockets of very poor people who need the food bank and the area is still the locus of recent immigrants, especially from the Philippines, Vietnam and mainland China.

From early on St. Ann had welcomed the only Indigenous Catholic Congregation in Toronto to worship at our parish. That work continues. Fr. Wilson Andrade, the Administrator of the Native Peoples, Mission has presented a proposal for a more intensive outreach ministry of the Mission and awaits Archdiocesan support. At St. Raphael Parish a concerted effort was made to have Laudato Si better known. This was also the case for the three parishes in Toronto (St. Ann, St. Joseph and Holy Name). Practical ways to implement ecological practices at the parishes were part of this.

Off to Peru and then back again:

When I arrived in Peru in January 1980, I was taken, the same day, to the headquarters of the Peruvian Bishops' Conference where we discussed the relaunch of a national human rights effort. (*Military rule had ended a few months before and conditions were right for this to happen.*) A few months later I found myself 500 kilometers to the north in the city of Chicla and was asked to join the staff of the diocesan Social Justice Centre with a specific responsibility for the prison there. Some months later I was asked to write an article about the prison. It turned into a book about conditions in the prison that gained national attention. I was then asked by the Maryknoll to become director of LADOC, a documentation service in English monitoring the Church's option for the poor throughout Latin America while continuing to work in our local parish (the largest in Latin America at the time) and also to be responsible for launching a formation

program initially with five students. This included teaching courses at the theology institute. After four years, I was asked to join the staff of a newly-founded centre (CEAPAZ – Centre for Study and Action on Peace). The job of our team was to implement a formation program for a new generation of community leaders in marginal areas. For the year I was there, the youth of our parish were the main target. At the same time, the area of the city where I lived had become a zone of major conflict and I worked at organizing a number of human rights defense groups in the population (among youth, teachers, local leaders, Religious etc.)

My time in Peru served well when I joined the national staff of the Canadian Religious Conference in 1995. I was assigned to edit the national newsletter and began calling on religious across Canada to present stories touching on their social justice commitments. Not long afterward the bulletin was given to someone else and I became the social justice coordinator for the team. This put me in touch with the four regional staff responsible for social justice. At one point we were able to organize a national meeting that gathered several hundred religious to look at issues Religious were engaged in throughout Canada. One outcome was a general commitment of Religious in Canada to issues of human trafficking, as well as poverty.

Leading up to the year 2000, Pope John Paul II called for a special attention to this event and in particular a call to cancel the bilateral debts of the poorest countries in the world. At that point I was representing the CRC at the Aboriginal Rights Coalition and had become co-president. (I was also president of the local housing coop where I lived.) These were three years of considerable public education across Canada and of activities lobbying the government for debt cancellation, something John Paul II had recommended. And it worked! Prime Minister Paul Martin did indeed cancel the bilateral debts of the poorest countries. Given the success of our efforts, the question was raised of founding a national ecumenical social justice organization to deal with the variety of issues that Canada faced. The result was Kairos Canada. Representing Canadian Religious I sat on the coordinating committee that put the project together and then also on the Board for the first couple of years of its existence.

After this, I became Assistant Executive Secretary for CCODP and again found myself facing serious social justice issues such caused by major tragedies

throughout the world including a tsunami in Indonesia, death squads in Central America and the assassination of Indigenous leaders and some Religious in South America. My first year, we raised 26 million dollars in emergency funds to assist affected communities in Indonesia and CCODP coordinated the global effort of Caritas International to respond to the emergency. It should be added that CCODP has pioneered an approach to emergency aid that is intended to strengthen local community leadership in the process of providing aid. For example, instead of bringing in companies to rebuild, CCODP works with local organizations to allow local people to do the rebuilding themselves.

Conclusion:

And that brings us up to date: Fredericton, Welland, Chiapas, Peru, Toronto, India, Haiti, Dominica. It's a complex story, one full of initiative and impact.