

## **THE HOLY CROSS TRI-SOCIETAL HISPANIC MINISTRY COMMITTEE: A GRASS-ROOTS PROFESSIONAL ORGANIZATION**

**By Fr. John Phalen CSC**

For 36 years that I can account for, from 1976 until 2012, Holy Cross Sisters, Brothers and Priests joined forces to form what turned out to be a type of professional organization to train and support members of the four Congregations as well as their lay associates in their service to the Hispanic populations of the United States and Monterrey, Mexico. It was termed ***The Holy Cross Tri-Society Hispanic Ministry Committee***. It both contributed to and often responded to the conclusions and the methods of the National Encuentros, the Pastoral Letter and the National Pastoral Plan for Hispanic Ministry of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops.

National meetings were held annually and regional meetings semi-annually in the various areas where Holy Cross ministry to Latinos took place. These areas numbered 30 and included Austin, TX, Washington DC, Notre Dame, IN, Mountain View, CA, Long Beach, CA, Mount Rainier, MD, St. Mary's University, ND, IN, San Fernando, CA, Brooklyn, NY, San Antonio, TX, Douglaston, NY, San Juan, TX, Coachella, CA, Chicago, IL, North Easton, MA, Valdosta, GA, Park City, UT, Ciudad Guadalupe, Mexico, McAllen, TX, New Orleans, LA, Tampa Bay (Dade City), FL, Fresno, CA, Corpus Christi, TX, Goodyear, AZ, Bronx, NY, Manchester NH, Holy Cross College, ND, IN, Spring, TX, Los Angeles CA and Silver Spring, MD.

Experts in the field of Hispanic Ministry who addressed the Committee included: Bishop Patricio Flores of San Antonio, the first US Hispanic Bishop, who encouraged the flock, especially musically and culturally; Father Alan Figueroa Deck, SJ, of Los Angeles, who compared Anglo and Hispanic cultures; Fr. Frank Ponce, who spoke on Basic Christian Communities; Rogelio Manrique and Olga Villa-Parra of the Spanish-Speaking Catholic Commission, who presented Liberation Theology and Popular Religiosity; Sister Dominga Zapata, of the National Secretariate for Hispanic Affairs, who highlighted the Formation of Hispanics, as did Fr. Jesus Iriondo and Henry Concepcion of the Canons Regular of the Lateran.

Other experts included: Mrs. Ruth Doyle and Fr. Raul Delvalle, of the Archdiocese of New York, who explained the results of their two-volume study of Hispanics in New York City; Br. Bruce Lecher, CSC, who spoke on Prophetic Ministry; Auxiliary Bishop Peter Rosazza, of Hartford, who addressed Diocesan Hispanic Ministry; Auxiliary Bishop Rene Valero of NYC, who spoke on Hispanic Leadership Style; Mario Paredes, Director of the Northeast Pastoral Institute of NYC, who encouraged participation in the language and ministry training programs of the Institute; Dr. Jeanette Goetchens, MD, founder and resident physician of Christ House (for the homeless) in Washington, DC, who encouraged outreach to the poor; Archbishop Marcos McGrath, CSC, of Panama, who addressed us on his participation in the Puebla Conference; Fr. John Korcsmar, CSC, who with Lead Organizer Ernie Cortez, explained Community Organizing; Ms. Carole Norris, Director of the Office of Black Ministry, Diocese of Brooklyn, and Fr. Herbert Charles of the Holy Ghost Fathers, who discussed the complementarity of ministry to Blacks and Hispanics; Pablo Sedillo, Director of the Secretariate for Hispanic Affairs of the US Bishops, who spoke on the Encuentro process; Fr. Dan Groody, CSC, who shared about the plight of Hispanic migrants in the US; and Fr. Joe Pawlicky, CSC, who addressed us on the Pastoral Center in Coachella, CA, and Fr. Edmundo Rodriguez, who led a Biblical Retreat; And there were more!

Among them were: Fr. Tom Shea, CSC, who spoke on the history of the Holy Cross mission in Peru; Dr. Armando Navarro, President of the Congreso Para Los Pueblos Unidos, who depicted the political situation of the 8 million Hispanics in the west and the need for voter registration; Fr. Luis Olivares, Pastor of La Placita Parish in downtown Los Angeles, past president of PADRES organization of Hispanic priests in the US, founder of UNO (United Neighborhood Organization), who urged the study of the 1983 letter of the US Catholic Bishops on the Hispanic Presence; Ms. Liz Conner, who explained the activities of La Casa de Amistad Youth and Community Center in South Bend; Bro. Dr. Stanley Cullota CSC, who with then Brother and Nurse Jim Martin CSC gave a tour of the medical clinic where they served the mostly Hispanic population of San Antonio, TX, and Fr. Virgil Elizondo, who talked on Mestizos (Latinos of mixed race).

### 3.

The Committee served as both initiation in Hispanic Ministry for those new to it, as well as ongoing formation for both Hispanics and non-Hispanics who ministered to Latino communities and/or individuals. The apostolates to Hispanics in which members of the Committee participated included parishes and schools, medical clinics and hospitals, community organizations, movements such as Cursillo de Cristiandad (a Short Course in Christianity) and the Charismatic Renewal, campus ministry, ministry to campesinos (farmworkers), immigration and legal advocacy, prison ministry, formation, family ministry, youth ministry, Catholic Charities, bilingual education, missionary work in el Salvador, Mexico, Chile and Peru, Pastoral Centers such as the Valley Missionary Program in Coachella, ministry to addicts, spiritual direction, housing programs, prayer ministry and rural ministry, day care, catechesis, and social service centers such as La Casa de Amistad (House of Friendship) in South Bend and the Holy Cross Center of San Antonio, Tx. In 1986, the Committee Directory of Holy Cross Hispanic Apostolates showed 69 settings where Hispanic Ministry took place involving one or more of the 4 Holy Cross Congregations. With the exception of the project in Ciudad Guadalupe in Mexico, all took place within the boundaries of the United States.

The style of Committee encounters was typical of Hispanic cultural tendencies, especially putting persons and their wellbeing before pressing business issues. It was the practice for Hispanic Ministry Committee meetings to begin with lively music, prayer and a welcoming session for both travelers from afar and for the many religious and laity from the local surroundings and ministries who were invited to attend the sessions. All sat in a circle and when their time came, they felt free to speak frankly and sometimes comically of the experiences they were going through, the successes and challenges of the Hispanic community where they ministered, and the social and political situation of the area. Hardy laughter and clever quips often soothed the pain of difficult encounters and sometimes even outright experiences of racism. But the most important issue was how the participants were doing personally, in terms of possible isolation or accompaniment, support or lack of same, networking with their Holy Cross colleagues and their health, both physical and psychological. Always there was a tour of the local ministry.

#### 4.

The Hispanic Ministry Committee held regional meetings as well as national ones; the largest of the national meetings were called Convocations. This gave the regional group an opportunity to invite speakers on the topics most important to their region of the country and the ministries offered there. It also required more leadership from each area and that strengthened the membership of the Committee. The eastern region could concentrate on the results of the study on Hispanics of New York and apply the insights locally right away. The farmworker situation received more attention in the Midwest and west, while the migration border issues of the south could be addressed for those in ministry there, where moving across the border to the north or south was a daily event. Schools, hospitals, media ministry and the creative Valley Missionary Program took priority for the western region.

A watershed moment in the history of the Committee was the result of the first two National Encuentros of Hispanics and those ministering among them. In 1983 the US Bishops approved *The Hispanic Presence*, a pastoral letter on Hispanic Ministry. This was followed by the Third National Encuentro of 1985, which established the guidelines for the writing of the National Pastoral Plan for Hispanic Ministry, which appeared in 1987. Implementing these documents and especially the Pastoral Plan became an objective of the National Committee and its regional components. It was a time of great hope for the future. Terms such as “*Pastoral de Conjunto*”, which means collaborative, or team ministry, became bywords, indicating how all the different aspects of ministry to Hispanics, from Basic Ecclesial Communities to integral education; from social justice to evangelization; from leadership training to youth ministry and vocation work, were interrelated and interdependent in order to become the model of Church these documents envisioned. As the Pastoral Plan expressed it, “It is not only a methodology, but the expression of the essence and mission of the church, which is to be and to make communion.”<sup>1</sup> This aspect fits perfectly in the vision of Pope Francis on “*synodality*”. Another such term is “*mística*” the sense of the presence of God in daily living and the pastoral care, family spirituality and popular devotion so evident in the various Hispanic cultures.<sup>2</sup>

**What effect did the activity of the Hispanic Ministry Committee have on the works of Holy Cross?** Most of those who participated in Committee meetings have had firsthand experience assisting undocumented Hispanics to get legal aid and just treatment. Examples would be Sr. Gertrude Samanda CSC and her pastoral team who accompanied Michigan's migrant community with education, pastoral service and material assistance for decades; also, the research and publications of Fr. Dan Groody CSC, of Notre Dame, have enlightened many about the daily reality of immigrant families; Fr. Mark Cregan CSC, has assisted religious and laity from Latino countries in his practice of Immigration law. Holy Cross Ministries of Utah also offers legal assistance to Hispanics. Family oriented retreats and Encuentros (gatherings) sponsored by parishes, dioceses, Holy Cross Family Ministries and Holy Cross Ministries of UT 3. have affirmed the Hispanic appreciation of family and family prayer. A highlight was the "Rosary Bowl", celebrated in Pasadena, California in 2007, attended by 40,000 mostly Hispanic faithful. Spanish films by Family Theater Productions have been useful for catechesis in the States and in Latin America.

Members of the Committee encouraged each other to try new projects or imitate facets of the ministry that were helpful in some other parts of the four Congregations. One example would be community organizing in Austin (Austin Interfaith), San Antonio (COPS), Los Angeles (UNO), Phoenix (Valley Interfaith), Brockton, MA (Brockton Community Organization), the Bronx (South Bronx Churches), and Brooklyn (East Brooklyn Congregations). The Committee also improved communication within and among the four Congregations through representatives from among the Provincials or Generals (Congregational Leaders, Presidents, Animatrices) or their councils who were members and reported on the Committees' recommendations. The Committee submitted a proposed Pastoral Plan for Holy Cross Hispanic Ministry to the Chapters in 1982 and 1983 and another in 1987, which were received by most very positively. Official statements from Provinces and Generalates on Nicaragua, El Salvador, the Sanctuary Movement, the Dreamers and ICE's separating children from their undocumented parents were suggested or encouraged to Chapters by the Committee or its members.

## 6.

The Committee definitely increased contact among members of the different Congregations, with sisters, brothers and priests assisting each other's projects by giving retreats, training sessions, talks, and the like. The family spirit in Holy Cross is a shared value with Hispanics. Holy Cross institutions of education have provided more scholarships for Hispanics. This complements the pastoral and social work of Holy Cross. While many of these activities cannot be attributed solely to the work of the Committee, it's focus on this area and willingness to make suggestions as a grassroots organization not part of the authority structure of the Congregations has helped, or so we hope. The Committee has made several suggestions as to the formation of Hispanics, especially regarding the importance of connection with family. Two direct achievements of the then Southern Province were the creation of houses of formation for predominantly Hispanic young adults in Austin and in San Antonio, and the establishment of the Mexico project, still very much ongoing, in Ciudad Guadalupe, Monterrey, Mexico. The Committee encouraged these projects, supported them and rejoiced at the success of the Southern Province in bringing them about.

In 1984 and again in 1986, Latin American Holy Cross offered a Renewal of Religious Life in Peru, which involved Brazil, Chile, Peru, and 3 representatives in each event from the United States Hispanic Ministry Committee. This was an excellent six-week experience which informed the participants about the history and pastoral de conjunto of Holy Cross in each of the Latin American countries and encouraged the work of those ministering in the USA. This and the encouragement of the Mexico project were probably our two most productive successes. These were evidence of a good relationship between the Latin American missions and the members of the Committee.

At one point in 2006, Fr John Korcsmar, CSC called upon the men's congregation to consider how much Hispanic Ministry had grown in the previous 30 years. He put it this way: "Besides Texas, we started with three Seminarians living on Birdsell Street and one priest working in in South Bend. We had no parish. We had some resources from the Diocese

## 7.

of Fort Wayne-South Bend, but not much more. Because of the efforts of so many people, today Holy Cross has:

- Two Hispanic parishes in Phoenix.
- A large parish and the Valley Missionary Program in Coachella, CA.
- A large multi-ethnic parish in South Bend
- A parish in Portland with Masses in Spanish.
- A growing effort at recruiting Latinos and doing Hispanic Ministry at Notre Dame.
- King's College seeking more ways to serve Hispanics in the Wilkes-Barre area.
- Stonehill College working to attract and keep students from different cultures.
- A priest in New Bedford, MA working with indigenous from Guatemala.
- St. Edward's University in Austin, TX which is credentialed as an Hispanic-serving institution and has a nationally recognized College Assistance Migrant Program (CAMPO).
- Three parishes in the Diocese of Austin, TX, one of which is majority immigrant now.
- Two houses of formation in Texas which are prepared to work with U.S. Hispanics and Latinos.
- Four houses of formation in Monterrey, Nuevo Leon, Mexico.
- A large parish in Monterrey: Nuestra Señora de la Luz.
- Five Holy Cross brothers and one Marianite of Holy Cross teaching at San Juan Diego Prep, a school in the Cristo Rey model to help Latinos afford a quality college prep education. (How many other high schools have 6 Holy Cross religious working in them?)
- Two other high schools (Holy Trinity in Chicago and Holy Cross in San Antonio) that educate primarily poor U.S. Hispanic and immigrant Latino students.
- Holy Cross Family Ministries in the U.S., Mexico and Latin America.
- The building of links among immigrants and between Holy Cross parishes in Austin, TX and Monterrey, Mexico (and soon with the help of Family Rosary, in Rio Verde, S.L.P.)<sup>4</sup>.

NOTICIAS de Santa Cruz, the newsletter for the Committee, spread the news about Holy Cross involvement with Hispanic ministry and was well received by various congregations and Pastoral Institutes of the U.S.. Here are some examples of their responses:

In June of 1983, Maria Luisa Gaston, the Executive Secretary of SEPI, the Southeast Pastoral Institute in Miami, wrote: "Sister Adelaide Cannon, CSC recently completed her studies in Hispanic Pastoral Ministry at our Southeast Pastoral Institute (SEPI). She left with me a copy of your report on the recent meeting of the CSC Hispanic Ministries Committee. I read it with much interest and was impressed by the commitment of the group, the organizational structure and the goals you have set for yourselves. I wish every religious community were this much aware of the need for service to the Hispanic community and committed to it as you are! . . . Again, it is a joy to see the commitment of your Holy Cross communities to Hispanic ministry."

Another such communication came from Rev. Joseph Tobin CSSR dated April 2, 1984: " Thank you so much for the valuable materials I received today. I appreciate Vicente Lopez's forwarding to you my request for any materials regarding a corporate approach to Hispanic ministry. The apostolate and vision of the Holy Cross is very impressive, to say the least!! It will be a great help to the midwestern province of the Redemptorists. "

The Holy Cross Hispanic Ministry Committee grew out of a felt need. Most who worked with Hispanics in the USA were self-taught except for language. In time, pastoral help was available in places like the Mexican American Cultural Center and the Hispanic Pastoral Institutes. But there was no ongoing help from a professional organization for training, continuing education and especially for support for our few Hispanics and our particular ministries in Holy Cross. We are grateful to the Committee for this and our hope is that Holy Cross trained, faith filled, family-oriented Hispanics, both religious and lay, can help renew the Church in the United States through their commitment, their strong faith, their training and their knowledge and practice of The Holy Cross charism and spirituality.



**ENDNOTES:**

1. National Pastoral Plan for Hispanic Ministry, "Terminology" section: *Pastoral de Conjunto. U.S. Bishops, 1987.*
2. Mistica is defined by the Pastoral Plan as "The series of motivations and deep values which enliven the process of the people and create experiences of faith, producing a spirituality which encourages life and pastoral work." Ibid, in *Origins*, vol 17No 26, Dec. 10, 1987.
3. Both of these organizations joined the Committee around 2005, and more laity who collaborated with Holy Cross in the ministry began attending the meetings.
4. From NOTICIAS, Autumn 2006, by John Korcsmar, CSC, inviting Holy Cross to the "SUMMIT Meeting in 1987.