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PAROCHIAL MINISTRY IN THE EASTERN PRIEST  
PROVINCE: 1934 TO THE PRESENT

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ARCHIVES



MIDWEST PROVINCE  
Congregation of Holy Cross  
Notre Dame, Indiana

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HOLY CROSS

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One of the special charisms of Father Moreau involves his insight into the concept of an "Auxiliary" priest. He envisioned the great need of the church in his day to contribute to the strengthening of the deteriorated Catholic educational system as well as the parochial ministry which suffered greatly from its depleted membership and organization in post-Revolutionary France. Gradually, his idea germinated when, with great difficulty, he managed to institute canonically something quite novel in the Church of his day - a rather democratic community consisting of both lay and clerical members who together would invigorate the Church in its academic and parochial ministries and dedicate themselves to work alongside diocesan personnel wherever their efforts needed enhancement.

Early records of the Association of Holy Cross indicate that the struggle to implement this plan worked well in the educational apostolate. The strictly "parochial" venture suffered some set-backs. This seemed due mainly to the objections of Bishop Bouvier of Le Mans who feared competition with his diocesan authority and the call of Holy Cross to engage in strictly foreign missionary work. Thus it happened that Holy Cross seemed destined mainly to concentrate on the educational apostolate in its early years.

Emphasis on the second part of Father Moreau's "community" insight was stressed by our fourth Superior General, Father Gilbert Français. In his Circular Letter, dated January 2, 1912, he remarked:

"The purpose of our Congregation is not only Christian instruction and the education of youth...but also preaching, giving missions, the apostolate of the divine word... In each of the provinces something has been done in this sense, but the attempts were feeble, transitory, incomplete and productive of no lasting fruit. This part of our work remains to be created in its entirety and there are grave motives for our undertaking it."

One year later, in another Circular, dated April 15, 1913, this same Father states:

"The last General Chapter recognized the great utility, not to say the necessity, of establishing in each of our provinces a house of missionaries, the forerunner of similar houses in the future. In confining our work to universities, colleges and schools, we were not accomplishing the full purpose of our rules, and, that, given the varying aptitudes of different subjects, we incurred the risks of having no field for vocations resolutely drawn to the ministry of preaching."

It was shortly after this admonition that a Mission Band was organized in the United States Province. Father James French, superior of the Little Seminary at Notre Dame and himself an accomplished preacher, organized this. One of the first members of this association was Father James Wesley Donahue. Father Donahue succeeded Father Francois as Superior General of the Congregation and it was he who made the first provisions for the creation of an Eastern division of the community. Together with Father French, Donahue preached many missions throughout the country and in the East where he made friends with many Church authorities. His motivation for moving Holy Cross eastward betrays the need for parish assistance. Besides the possibility of many vocations to the community and the gratitude to the many friends made in the east, Donahue's intention was to have community members preach missions in the east and contribute in whatever way they could to parochial assistance. In his Circular Letter #22, dated September 15, 1936, we find him remark that:

"From a Catholic point of view the eastern part of the country is fertile soil for apostolic works. Eleven million souls exist in New York alone and the same number is to be found in Massachusetts, Connecticut and Rhode Island."

Early records of Holy Cross' work in the East reflect the initial story of the Association in France. It was first educational establishments and then assistance in parishes. In an Article printed in the Fall River, Massachusetts "Herald News" for March 29, 1935, one reads

of the beginning of "a new Mission Band as the third New England establishment of the Congregation of Holy Cross." This was preceded by the start of Our Lady of Holy Cross Seminary in North Dartmouth, Massachusetts and the staffing of Monsignor Coyle High School in Taunton, Massachusetts.

The Eastern Mission Band's Chronicles show a remarkable record of broadening its scope of operation into several dioceses and an assistance into numerous parochial works. From its beginning in the summer of 1934 where the men "marked the beginning of week-end work in parishes of the Fall River Diocese: in the towns of Wareham, Falmouth, Oak Bluffs and other places, as requested", members of the Band expanded themselves to help in the Archdioceses of Boston, New York, Philadelphia, Baltimore and Washington, D.C., and in the Dioceses of Providence, Rhode Island, Manchester, New Hampshire, Rochester, New York, Hartford, Connecticut, Newark, New Jersey, Burlington, Vermont, Buffalo and Albany, New York and Portland, Maine.

Wherever the Mission Band went, it engaged in many parochial tasks: preaching its prescribed talks, parlor calls, visiting the sick, blessing families and attention to various parish constituencies like: ushers, altar boys, choir members and a general availability to parishioners. Far in advance of its time, Holy Cross men even conducted special missions for non-Catholics and thus were pioneers in ecumenics and convert-making. Much is made today of intra-provincial borrowing and collaboration in Holy Cross. Early records of the Mission Band illustrate that from its beginning "many priests from the Western Province assisted for summer-time parish help in the East."

Spiritual renewal of parishes was uppermost in the missionaries' work and obviously could be quite demanding at times. Records indicate



that at one point "In the Bronx, New York, we unusually had missions going on at the same time in three adjacent parishes." At another point, the call for manpower to help out is dramatically drawn. "From St. Boniface Church in Elmont, New York, a certain Father J. Augustine Rath called Father Joseph Hart, C.S.C., then Superior of the Mission Band, for a parish assistant "for an indefinite period of time". "Our men are all busy" was Father Hart's reply. Whereupon this pastor remarked, "Then why don't you come yourself?" As it turned out, Father Hart did oblige this pastor for a period of two months as parochial assistant!

Scarcely an Eastern Diocese was left out of the schedule of the Holy Cross Mission Band from 1934 to 1946 and beyond.

With the start of our Eastern colleges, newer outlets were made for an additional exposure of Holy Cross priests to parochial work. From its beginning in 1946 the clerical faculty of King's College regularly celebrated daily Masses in the surrounding parishes of the Scranton, Pennsylvania Diocese, assisted with Confessions on Saturdays and celebrated - oftentimes with one priest binating at two different parishes - the Sunday liturgies. It was not unknown even to have some members of the King's priest faculty take a plane ride to serve in the farthest regions of the sprawling Scranton Diocese in Williamsport. It was quite a rarity in the early days of this school for any member to have a week-end off. In addition, many members of the faculty staff offered voluntary lectures - free of charge - on the teachings of the Second Vatican Council and contributed a battery of workshops for years for the certification of CCD teachers in local parishes. All these were in addition to a full schedule of week-time teaching.

Close to the same story is applicable to the faculty of Stonehill

College which was founded in 1948. "These parochial assignments, to the Fall River, Providence or Boston areas, were regularly given," Fr. Marc Hebert remarked (in an interview at North Dartmouth, on August 18, 1986) and were not voluntary as is sometimes the case today." Twelve out of thirteen faculty members fanned out - relaying priest passengers to various locales - oftentimes for an overnight stay in the farther away parishes."

The same story could be told of Holy Cross priests in our Eastern high schools. When Father Baker High began in 1952, the parishes in Lackawanna and Buffalo regularly saw our priests daily and on weekends as far away as the town of Hamburg, New York. Notre Dame High in Bridgeport also supplied parish assistance throughout the western part of Connecticut.

This record holds true to the early 1950's. It must be admitted that it tells the story of rugged, though "part-time" parish help on the part of Holy Cross. It fulfills well the role of Moreau's "Auxiliary" priest. What was still lacking to the record is the "full-time" assistance Holy Cross might give within the parish itself.

Indications of this growing involvement of C.S.C. in the parish is reflected in the statistics derived from the Eastern Province Directories. With a steadily increasing community membership, there is indicated here a steadily rising figure in the numbers of these actually working full-time in the parochial ministry. From the number of two in the annual Eastern Vice-Province Directory of 1949 to the present number of 21 in our yearly 1986 listing, the number of priests in diocesan rectories shows signs of further growth in full-time Holy Cross parish involvement.

These numbers reflect those men who were employed in parishes unaffiliated with Holy Cross proper. A whole new chapter in the Eastern Priest Province history is begun when our community was canonically entrusted by contract to take over several parishes and provide manpower for them.

It was due to the urgings of provincial counsellor, Fr. Thomas C. Duffy, C.S.C., that plans for a Newman Club and parish begin close to the University of Rhode Island in Kingston. The year 1951 witnessed Fr. Joseph Wiseman and his assistant, Fr. John Daly, working hard to realize this project. This Newman Center, with the approval of Bishop McVinney of Providence, started from scratch. Even though the great vision for it included the idea that "it would be the awakening of the South County of Rhode Island to Catholicism, a great aid to the more than 700 Catholic students there, and project that would add to the variety of our apostolates," realization of it would amount to a big sacrifice on Holy Cross' part. The pastor's salary would be only \$800 and the assistant's only \$600 a year. Nevertheless, the 'building years' for Fathers Wiseman and Daly proved fruitful. It was by their own hard labor and without any significant help from diocesan officials that a respectable parish was established and a breakdown of a certain Masonic, anti-Catholic bias at the university was effected. A World War II army quonset hut was acquired for a church and used pews and furnishings from other places being refurbished were collected. A tiny rectory was also bought. This had been a farm house. So poor and small was this house that Fr. Daly would remark: "We had to leave our room to change our mind."

Despite an evident lack of great elegance, both workers quickly got on with the main tasks which brought them there. Much PR work eventually paid off, for not only did Christ the King Parish become the meeting

ground for many single students of URI, but it became also a popular center for a large group of married veteran students. Frequently, both priests served as advisors for the many naval servicemen in the area. So close did relations become between university officials and these two priests, that the latter were able, not only conduct their own parish and Newman Club activities, but even now and then they offered an occasional lecture series within the university itself.

For the next five years, Fathers Wiseman and Daly continued to do admirable work at this parish and Newman Center in Kingston, Rhode Island. So successful and appreciated by their parishioners was their work that Provincial, Fr. Connerton could remark: "The Parish and Newman Club have developed rapidly and this little parish makes a greater return financially per priest than any of the other units of our Province." A visit there by second Provincial, Father George DePrizio, however, uncovered some dissatisfaction with the plight of these two Holy Cross priests. DePrizio found out that they were working and living in the same poor circumstances as they had begun with no help materially or financially from the Diocese of Providence. The buildings had become inadequate, especially the residence, and the salaries had not been increased. After a plea to the diocese for some concern in these areas proved fruitless for Holy Cross, the decision to withdraw both priests from this parish was inevitable. The continuing story of this parish is ironic for when diocesan personnel took over quite modern facilities were quickly put up in 1956!

The careers of both pioneer "parish priests" connect the continuing story of Eastern parish work with the following account. It was the request in 1958 of Bishop Robert Joyce of the Burlington, Vermont Diocese that invited Holy Cross to take over Sacred Heart Parish in downtown Bennington. This had been a French national parish. When its first Holy



Cross pastor, Fr. Joseph Wiseman assumed his role, it became a territorial one. Many Holy Cross priests have staffed this parish over the years and continue to do so. Community members from the eastern novitiate in Bennington and Holy Cross members on the staff of Bennington Catholic High School served in the many areas of parochial life here. One closely identified with this parish and who epitomized well the community's balance of educational and parochial work was Fr. Vincent Spinelli, C.S.C. He was principal of Bennington Catholic High School and parochial assistant at this parish until his dual career was cut short when he was killed in a tragic airplane accident in 1965 at the age of only 39! Holy Cross teachers at this school and in the novitiate helped out in this parish for years, and this parish flourishes to this day under the care of our community now for 29 years.

The Eastern Province's next venture into full-time parochial ministry begins in 1965. In this year, at the invitation of Bishop James Connelly of the Fall River Diocese Holy Cross was requested to investigate the possibilities of beginning a parish south of Stonehill College. Reports reached this bishop that many people from the Boston area were moving into this area and that they needed parochial attention. Bishop Connelly contacted community officials and arrangements were speedily made in this year for a Holy Cross Parish in South Easton, Massachusetts.

At this time Father John Murphy was a superior of Holy Cross Fathers Seminary in North Easton. He invited Father Joseph Hanna, former superior of the Eastern Mission Band, to come and live at the seminary and to draw up plans for this parish. Father Hanna conducted the Sunday liturgies in the main chapel of the seminary between 1965 and 1966. The then Brother Thomas Carten who was community cemetery and grounds keeper was helper

to Father Hanna during this time. Tom used to go out by truck and transport many migrant workers from the farms and cranberry bogs in the area to these Sunday liturgies.

This Holy Cross Parish in South Easton was completed in 1966. Father Hanna was the first pastor. The parishioners there could well be proud of their beautiful, colonial-style church and parish hall which he designed. His pastorate was not to last very long, however. Soon after taking charge, his health failed from a stroke and Fr. John Murphy became the second Holy Cross pastor. This parish is one of the many to be continually staffed by our community for 21 years now. Throughout this period this parish church has been "the" focal point for all Eastern Province ordinations and many of its funeral celebrations.

The next opportunity for Holy Cross in regular contracted full-time parish work came when a kind of "contest" ensued in 1973 at the instigation of Bishop Peter Gerety of Portland, Maine. This prelate sent out a missive to twenty-five religious communities urging priest manpower help for his diocese and offering the ones who would take it the pick of his parishes! Holy Cross was one of the communities asked. A delegation went up there, surveyed several parishes and willingly overtook Most Holy Trinity Parish in Saco. From its first pastor, Fr. Bob Brennan, C.S.C., our men have been in this parish now for 16 years. Many Holy Cross deacons have served their apprenticeship here and from all reports the people find our community service there quite acceptable.

The years 1975 and 1976 have found our province blessed with other parish offerings. These include a new involvement of Holy Cross in the State of Vermont. This state has heavily depended on outside help for its widely scattered rural country parishes. In 1975, responding to

Bishop John Marshall's request, the Eastern Province began its tenure to St. Anthony's Parish in Bethel. This parish presented great opportunity for Holy Cross and fit in well with Fr. Moreau's desire that his community work in "country" places. In the very next year two more country parishes were manned by Eastern Holy Cross men in Vermont. St. Mary's Parish in Brandon and St. Monica's in near-by Forrestdale. Each of these have had very colorful pastors over the years. Father Albert Croce, C.S.C. who has been in just about every Holy Cross ministry that can be imagined has been at St. Mary's for the past eight years. One of the most talented of province men, Fr. Al, besides doing a most creditable job at the parish, spends hours at multiple hobbies - like designing Easter Eggs, fixing clocks, collecting antiques, tuning pianos and other musical instruments, arranging sidewalk sales, scheduling orchestral concerts, getting to know non-Catholics in the area and so many other things! (A whole talk could be given on this Holy Cross man!) Another pastor at St. Monica's was Fr. Frank Gartland, C.S.C. His publishing ventures for The Sunday Visitor and Catholic Boy Magazine and his long-time campus ministry work at Notre Dame are renown. It was Fr. Frank's suggestion to the Burlington diocesan authorities that made it so that Sts. Mary and Monica's Parishes were united into one. These two parishes have been served well by a number of our men now for the past eleven years.

1977 witnessed the fruition of the plans and dreams of three years by a group of Easterners for a "parish of service" to very poor people. Frs. Hugh Cleary, Tom O'Hara and Norbert Sinski (IP), together with Brother Richard Kyle, since 1975 had been meeting together at Nore Dame as a team with this particular idea in mind. Several dioceses in north-eastern United States were studied and an ideal setting for this work was

determined to be Our Lady of Good Counsel Parish in Brooklyn, New York. This very large place with six buildings includes Puerto Rican, Black and Irish populations. After intensive language study in Latin America and in Puerto Rico and after visits of the team and Provincial Fr. William Ribando with Bishop Francis Mugavero, a three year renewable contract was signed for Holy Cross' management of this parish. For ten years now our men have served admirably in this difficult spot.

This multi-racial and multi-lingual parish has offered many a challenge to those who continue to staff it with a new vision of parochial work. A blend of new and old techniques are evident in the many organizations at this place. The liturgy committee, parish council, bible study and Cursillo meetings are all flourishing new things, while the Holy Name Society, Sacred Heart Goup and CCD projects represent the older, long-established modes. Father Hugh Cleary has been pastor here since the beginning of Holy Cross' tenure here and he has welcomed the assistance of men from other Provinces in this work - a difficult one, since almost no one from the beginning has escaped a mugging or a theft in its rough neighborhood.

Bishop Mugavero has made several visits to this parish in his unique and entirely urban diocese which he views as "always experimental". He is ever trusting and supportive of Holy Cross' leadership. In these visitations this bishop has had two Holy Cross Deacon ordinations. Surely, it can be said that this is one of our Eastern Province's responses to one of the greatest needs in the urban parochial apostolate today.

So much more could be said of the Eastern Province's response here - in answer to Fr. Moreau's urging for parish help and renewal! Mention could be made of the thousands of summertime helpers given over all the years of our Province and of the dedicated service of so many Holy Cross



Priests who without any applause work in the most desolate of places - like Fr. Jerome Lawyer who has labored for years now with the poorest of the poor in Harlem, New York City and Fr. Charles Matusik who, besides working with disadvantaged college students with poor grammar and reading ability, has for years made himself available in freelance manner to help in a multiplicity of parishes unaffiliated with Holy Cross in New York City. Fr. Peverada, after years of teaching history and years of full-time parochial work in Maine, regularly helps out at three Fall River Diocesan parishes each week in addition to his daily full-time work in the Provincial Archives Center.

So many more facts could be gleaned on the parochial ministry in the East!

Suffice it to conclude that our current Eastern Province statistics show that we have a total of 24 Holy Cross priests presently engaged full-time in these parishes canonically entrusted to the community. This number coupled with those working full-time in places unaffiliated with the community to the total of 21 and those 30 Eastern Holy Cross Priests working in the military, hospital and campus ministry chaplaincies - all of which describe themselves as "parochial" - indicate clearly that very close to one half of the Eastern Province membership is and will continue to respond to parochial work in the East.

With the growing priest shortage and the trend of younger religious to enter parochial ministry, we can be quite assured that the vision of Fr. Moreau for a community with a balanced apostolate of educational and parochial work is being well realized in the Eastern Priest Province of Our Lady of Holy Cross.

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