

THE HOLY CROSS ASSOCIATES OF THE INDIANA PROVINCE

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by
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I. HISTORICAL INTRODUCTION

In the summer of 1977, Tim Scully, a temporarily professed seminarian, and Jerry Wilson, retired from the University of Notre Dame and then on the staff of Moreau Seminary, sat talking, musing, dreaming about a project. The project involved tapping the energy, faith, goodwill and availability of recent college graduates in what might be called "a Catholic Peace Corps", or even a Holy Cross version of the Jesuit Volunteer Corps. But what they talked about involved much more than either one of those programs.

They weren't talking big time but something modest and small. They were also talking something unique which would be more than simply a volunteer service program with a Holy Cross name on it. They wanted a program which would combine elements particularly fitted to our own Holy Cross tradition and charism which would draw these young people into a particular relationship with the Holy Cross community.

In the Fall of 1977 Jerry Wilson, who also happened to be a member of the provincial council of the Indiana Province, with the support of Richard Warner, provincial steward, presented the plan to the council. It was endorsed by the council and approved by the provincial, William M. Lewers. Recruitment at the University of Notre Dame, St. Mary's College and the University of Portland began shortly after that. Portland was selected as the site for the pilot project of the first group of Holy Cross Associates.

The following year the program expanded with an Associates household in Phoenix, Arizona. The year after that a house was opened in Hayward, California; the year after that in Colorado Springs, Colorado; in 1989 South Bend. An international dimension was added with a brief two year experience in Africa and a Chilean program was inaugurated in 1979 and continues to this day.

II. PROGRAM RATIONALE

There were several "situational" reasons for the development of the Holy Cross Associates program and several, more compelling, "goals" in its institution.

A. Situational reasons

1. Not all graduating seniors knew what they wanted to do with the next year of their lives, much less with the rest of their lives. Even after 16 years of education they were not yet ready to make some basic vocational decisions as to what they wanted their life's pursuit to be. They felt that they needed more time - and perhaps a broader experience beyond education - to help them decide.

2. Even those who were fairly firmly set on their professional pursuits (law, business, medicine, etc.) were not yet ready to embark on their 17th year of education. Some felt a need for some time out before beginning their professional studies, time out from the fairly self-centered task of education in order to be involved in something beyond themselves. Others thought that such an experience as an Associate year might help give perspective and motivation to their chosen professional studies.

3. Some felt a need to "give back" something of the rich endowment they had received from God and family. They were ready to give a year of human service, in tasks for which they were well equipped, in order to pay back a debt owed to society. Some just needed a time to give instead of receive.

4. Some were testing what might become for them a lifelong project of service. Perhaps they never would go into banking; perhaps they might find through this experience another way to live life.

5. Some saw this year after graduation as a luxury to do something which they might never have the opportunity to do for the rest of their lives. They knew that once they got "on track" with professional school or business or family, they opportunity would never come again.

All of the above only indicates that there were many people at the time (and no less so today) who were ready for such an experience - and, indeed, looking for something which would provide such a challenge. These were more than simply people looking for something to do because they did not know what else they wanted to do. They were people looking for the right kind of thing to do, something that would challenge them in the way they were looking to be challenged.

B. Program Goals and Components

The program never had a single goal; from its inception it has always been "multi-valent" in its goals. There are several important goals (and corresponding components) of the program:

1. Direct human service: It is important to engage people in some very basic direct human services: feeding the hungry, giving drink to the thirsty, clothing the naked. This face-to-face contact with human need and suffering is essential for the formation of values in the Christian tradition.

2. Experience of Christian lay ministry: This response to human need is more than "social service", however. The program seeks to inform the Associates perspective in such a way as to see this kind of human service in the context of faith. More is at stake in the service we do than meets the eye. It is a contact place for God; it is ministry that we do and not simple social work.

3. Community living: Associates live in mixed households of 5-6 people. Learning to live and work with others, with whom one is not committed to spend a lifetime, in a manner which could be identified as Christian often comes as an incredible and surprising challenge to the Associates. Family and other primary relationships are asked to be prioritized within the context of community living.

4. Simple living: Associates are challenged to live, simply, modestly, and from a common purse. Placement stipends were pegged to cover basic household expenses and program costs and well as a personal stipend of \$50 per month. Meals, travel, entertainment become modest and simple when there is little money for much beyond basics.

5. Collaboration with the local Holy Cross community. It was hoped that through the association with Holy Cross in the area there might be common ministries, either by the Associates joining in what Holy Cross was already doing or by Holy Cross joining in what the Associates were doing. Associates involvements would challenge (thought not by design) the established involvements of Holy Cross. Social and friendships ties might also be established between the Associates and the local community.

6. Life of prayer: If what each and all were engaged in was truly to be ministry, then there had to be in the life of each and in the life of the household a place for prayer. It would be, of course, a prayer that would have to reflect, their life, their involvements, their stage of development. To this effect, each would be expected to engage a spiritual director during the course of the year to help them sort out issues of faith, ministry, relationships and vocation.

What the Holy Cross Associates program was NOT expected to be was a recruitment program for religious life and priesthood. Other communities had set up such programs under the guise of getting young potential recruits close to them; from there they might be recruited into a community which had fewer and fewer young members. Lay ministry was not to be used as a subterfuge for vocational recruitment. It came as no surprise to us, however, that young people attracted by the program values and components described above might see an attraction to religious life and ministry among us.

III. ISSUES AND QUESTIONS

With the passages of time and the accumulation of experience certain questions and issues emerge concerning the program:

A. Where there is goodwill, generosity, enthusiasm, deep concern - and no faith - then conflicts are inevitable. What happens when an agnostic or non-believer is part of the program or a local household? The tensions are severe, especially when it comes to community prayer. Various stages of faith development can be accommodated but the conflict between belief and unbelief seems too strong for a household to sustain. That basic shared value is a pre-requisite for common life and action. And, we later learned to ask, how does one test for faith during the interview/admissions process, especially when candidates can speak the language of faith knowing that this is the "coinage of the realm" or the price of admission to the program?

B. How close to Holy Cross do they/we want them to be? These people are not joining a religious community and are not expected to follow our traditions. Nor are they being sent to be cheap labor in our institutions. Disillusionment with the religious community can set in; youthful ideals for priests and religious are shattered and associates can be overdemanding in their expectations of priesthood and religious life. Either group can come under too close a scrutiny by moving too closely within the other's orbit. A certain amount of independence is necessary and healthy for each.

C. Community life and prayer issues tend to be back burner stuff until later in the year. The initial energy goes into ministry placements. It's only when things in the household get lesser attention for some time that an uneasiness sets in and with it a discontent with things in the household. Communications usually have broken down - and not even had a chance to get started. Frustrations have been left unspoken and are now ready to erupt. Establishing healthy levels of communications, especially ones that involve conflict resolution skills, are particularly important. Communications techniques have been built into the orientation programs but are often forgotten several months later when they are needed.

D. Simple living isn't so simple, especially when the temptation to lean on outside resources is so readily available. Can an Associate travel home for her brother's wedding? And if the local household cannot afford it who pays for it? And who decides? And what if she goes anyway because her parents insist on paying for it? And if she can go for a brother's wedding why can't another go for his roommates?

E. While the Associates community becomes one's primary community for that year, the individuals do not necessarily become one's primary relationships. (Fears of coed households proved to be unfounded.) Best friends still exist elsewhere; fiances or serious relationships continue in the picture. How does one balance the competing priorities? What if all one's emotional support is sought in family or in girlfriend far off the scene?

F. What is the association with the local Church? If the Associates primary religious affiliation is through the Holy Cross community, then how do they integrate what they are doing into some perspective of local parish or Church? If we do not assist them in seeing lay spirituality and ministry as something which the local Church does (or should do) in any locality, then are we preparing them for an unreality?

G. How fair are we in preparing women for lay ministry in the Church? We can perhaps raise unrealistic expectations or diminish real problems about the role that women are invited to play in the Church today. Acceptance of women in the ministry of the local Church and parish varies greatly from parish to parish and diocese to diocese. What happens to them after they leave the program and return to local churches? Are they prepared for the reality of the situation or do we set them up for discouragement and/or alienation?

IV. FUTURE DIRECTIONS

A. When Associates leave the program many return to pick up their lives where they left off - in the pursuit of law, medicine, accounting. But it is never the same. The challenge before them is to integrate their changed values, changed self, into their chosen profession. Where do they find models and support for integrating Christian values of ethics and service into these established professions. How can they use these professional skills for the sake of the most needy and poor?

B. Some leave behind dreams of professions and chose an uncertain life of direct service in shelters for the homeless, soup kitchens, etc. Resistance from family and friends is often great.

C. Where do they find a home in the Church? Who understands what they are up to? Who can appreciate their sense of involvement and ministry in the Church. Alienation is often a temptation during these years after Associates experience.

D. What is the role of Holy Cross is following up after the Associates experience? The year(s) in the program are perhaps the more intense; the years following it are perhaps more important since they deal with the tasks of integration into life profession and church of some of the basic values of lay ministry, faith, human service, community life and poverty. Is there a role for Holy Cross in all that?