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HOLY CROSS HISTORY CONFERENCE

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# "FROM TEXAS TO MEXICO"

BY PETER LOGSDON CSC

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### **Introduction:**

I am very happy to have this opportunity to share with you about some history of Holy Cross in Texas and in Mexico---I was a part of some of it. My interest in this History Conference began in 1982 when Brother William Dunn CSC was writing his booklet entitled "Early Years of Holy Cross in Texas". Then in 1985 Brother William wrote "The Finest Country in the World", also about Holy Cross in Texas. Likewise, over a period of 30 years, I had the good fortune to listen to all kinds of stories about Holy Cross in

Texas from Father Joseph Houser. Fr. Houser was ordained in 1937 and did most of his priestly ministry in Texas. And, finally, there is the booklet written by Father Christopher O'Toole in 1983 on the History of the Southern Province. It is called "Holy Cross in the South—a Perspective".

As an introduction to this topic of Holy Cross in Texas and Mexico, I want to mention a few things from the years 1870-1900.

- 1) In 1874 Father Edward Sorin, founder of Notre Dame and, by this time Superior General of the Congregation of Holy Cross, received a large donation of land in Austin, Texas from Mrs. Mary Doyle. The stipulation was that the Congregation of Holy Cross would start and run a Catholic School on that land. Eventually St. Edward's

School was begun.<sup>i</sup>

2) That same year Father Sorin asked the Bishop to give the administration of the only ~~Catholic~~ Catholic Church in Austin, St. Mary's, over to the Congregation of Holy Cross. The Bishop did so.

<sup>ii</sup>Also, in 1874, the Sisters of the Holy Cross began to teach at St. Mary's School.

3) In the latter part of the nineteenth century, the Priests, Brothers and Sisters from St. Edward's School and St. Mary's Parish went on horseback or by horse & buggy to serve Catholic Communities all around Austin. The priests celebrated Masses while the Sisters and Brothers taught catechism. At the same time that Holy Cross was organizing

Catholic Communities in Central Texas, the Oblates of Mary Immaculate were evangelizing in the San Antonio area and in the Rio Grande Valley of South Texas. <sup>iii</sup>

To narrow the scope of this paper, I will focus on how Holy Cross Hispanic Ministry developed in Central Texas in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century and how the Southern Province expanded into Mexico.

## **I. MINISTRY TO HISPANICS IN AUSTIN: A BREAKTHROUGH**

Patrick O'Reilly was born in Dublin, Ireland on March 28, 1871, studied in Salamanca, Spain and emigrated to the United States. Soon after his arrival, he entered the Congregation of Holy Cross and was ordained a

priest on September 19, 1902 at Sacred Heart on the Church on the campus of the University of Notre Dame.<sup>iv</sup> It wasn't long after ordination that Father O'Reilly developed tuberculosis and was sent to Austin, Texas to either recuperate or to die.

While getting treatment at the Catholic hospital called Seton Infirmary in Austin, he learned from other patients about the desperate plight of the Mexican-Americans and Mexican Nationals who were living and working in Central Texas. So, while being treated for his illness, he began to minister to the sick at the hospital and, in desperation, he began to pray to the Virgin of Guadalupe for a healing. In those prayers Father O' Reilly promised that if he were ever cured he would devote his whole life to caring for Hispanics in Central Texas. Miraculously, Father

O'Reilly got better and soon was asking the priests at St. Mary's Church in downtown Austin if he could celebrate a Mass there every week in Spanish. To their great credit the priests agreed to the request and very soon there was a desire among Hispanic people to form their own parish.

Construction began on a church in 1905 and in April of 1907 Our Lady of Guadalupe Church was dedicated at 5th and Guadalupe Streets in the center of Austin. It was an event that signaled a new moment in the life of the Catholic Church in the mostly-Anglo and mostly-Protestant heart of Texas.<sup>v</sup>

## **II. Holy Cross Hispanic Ministry in Central Texas**

In the mid-1930's four Spanish speaking priests were assigned to Austin: Fathers Frederick Schmidt, Thomas Culhane, Alfred Mendez and Joseph Houser. In an area called "South Austin", there was a tremendous population growth. To care for the English-speaking Catholics, Father Patrick Duffy established Saint Ignatius, Martyr Parish in 1937. Then, two years later, Father Alfred Mendez established San Jose Parish. Since San Jose was largest parish to care for the Spanish- speaking Catholics in the Austin area, it became known as the "Queen of the Missions". Two of the missions were San Francisco Javier in Creedmore and Santa Cruz in Buda. The reality is that the

Congregation of Holy Cross was responsible for establishing more than 30 Catholic Communities that are now parishes in the Diocese of Austin. <sup>vi</sup>

### **III. A Holy Cross Southern Province (1968)**

In the 1950's and 1960's there was another influx of people into Austin. From the Northern part of the United States came many Catholic families looking for work. From the South came many immigrants from Mexico who were also looking for work. About the same time, in 1958, the Holy Cross Brothers formed the South-West Province with its province headquarters in Austin.

In 1963 the Indiana Province formed the District of Texas. At that time there were eleven parishes

staffed by Holy Cross priests in Texas.

The first Superior of the District of Texas was Father Christopher J. O'Toole. He had been Superior General of the Congregation of Holy Cross from 1950-1962. After a sabbatical at Moreau Seminary on the campus of the University of Notre Dame, he took on the challenge of organizing the works of the Indiana Province in Central Texas. Father O'Toole had many contacts all over the United States and around the world and he began to raise a good deal of money for the works of the District of Texas. But, according to the records of the Indiana Province Chapter of 1967, the District could not become a province if it did not extend beyond Texas. So the Chapter decided that the province works in Louisiana

would be part of a new District of the South. It was also decided that if there were sufficient personnel, apostolates, seminarians and money, the District of the South could become a Province. It all happened very fast. The following year the General Chapter of 1968 declared that the District of the South would Become the Southern Province, beginning on September 15, 1968. <sup>vii</sup> Father O'Toole was appointed the first provincial of the new province.

#### **IV. First Holy Cross Parish in Mexico**

In the Southern Province the question always was: How did Father Frederick Schmidt become the first Holy Cross priest to work in Mexico? Well, after all these years, I can tell the whole story. In May of

1972, at the age of 65, Father Schmidt asked for a sabbatical. After 35 years of work with Mexican-Americans and Mexican Nationals in the area north of Austin--- Georgetown, Round Rock, Killeen and Copperas Cove--he wanted to spend some time in Mexico. What the provincial, Father O'Toole, didn't know was that Father Schmidt was looking for a parish that had no priest--- and soon he found one in the mountains of the state of San Luis Potosi.

As his 'working sabbatical' was coming to an end, he called Father O'Toole and pleaded with him to be able to stay there. He described how, when he first arrived, the people had waited for him for hours and how the children greeted him with

flowers and had put on a magnificent fiesta. Every day of the year the people would tell Fr. Schmidt how important it was for him to stay with them. They desperately needed a priest in their town! Father O'Toole brought the request to the provincial council. 'What to do?' he said more than once. Finally it was agreed that Father Schmidt could stay in Ahuacatlan, San Luis Potosi.<sup>viii</sup>

He was pastor there for the next 25 years and was "pastor emeritus" for five more. Also, for thirty years Father Schmidt was chaplain to the Dominican Sisters in the neighboring town of Xilitla. And, in addition, he founded a group of Franciscan Recollects in his parish where, with some help from benefactors in the United States, he built a beautiful

forty room convent right next to the Church. Soon the convent was full.

Many members of the Southern province visited Father Schmidt's parish and some, like Father Fred Underwood and Father John Korcsmar, took groups of young people on the 24 hour drive to the Mission. On January 12, 2003, at age 95, Father Fred Schmidt died at the Convent. He is buried in the crypt of the convent chapel.<sup>ix</sup>

#### **IV. Why take another parish in Mexico?**

In the 1950's, 1960's and 1970's, several Mission churches became parishes and Holy Cross slowly began to turn some parishes over to the Diocese. By the mid-1980's, there was an awareness in the

Southern Province that a whole new wave of immigrants were coming from Mexico into Texas. Unfortunately, they didn't seem to be welcomed in the same way that immigrants from Europe had been received into the United States. Could the Southern Province help in this transition?

Fr. Jack Keefe had been a missionary in Uganda for twenty years (1959-1979) and by 1985 he had become pastor of San Francisco parish Creedmore, TX, just outside of Austin. Father Keefe and his associate, Fr. Edward Kaufman, proposed that the Southern Province investigate the possibility of taking a parish in the Archdiocese of Monterrey, Mexico in the northern state of Nuevo Leon. Their

reasoning: it would be a parish where Holy Cross priests, brothers, sisters and seminarians could learn first-hand about the culture of Mexico and also learn the Spanish language. In addition, Holy Cross could help the Church in Mexico where the ratio was more than 5,000 Catholics for every priest who was working there. Also, this parish would be close to the Holy Cross communities in the Diocese of Austin---about a seven hour drive. <sup>x</sup>

## **V. Getting the OK**

So what about this new Mission in Mexico? With the history of Fr. Schmidt as a background to the request of Father Keefe and Father Kaufman to take a second parish in Mexico, Father Peter Logsdon, the Southern Province provincial met with his council to

decide what to do. In the end the provincial, with the consent of his council gave tentative approval for the project and , in December of 1986, Father Keefe, Father Kaufman and Father Len Collins who was Assistant Provincial and who also spoke Spanish, went to meet with Archbishop Adolfo Suarez Rivera at the chancery in Monterrey, Mexico. The Archbishop welcomed the Holy Cross priests stating that he had studied at the “Universidad Catolica” in Santiago, Chile where Father Marcos McGrath CSC (later Archbishop of Panama) had been the rector. Later that same day, the Archbishop's Vicar for the Municipality of Guadalupe took the Holy Cross priests on a tour of the area. In April of 1987, Fathers Keefe, Kaufman, Collins

And Logsdon went to Monterrey to look at two parishes that were without full-time pastors. They chose Santo Tomas Moro parish which was in a poor working class neighborhood on the south side of the Santa Catarina River. Besides the main Church, there were two chapels to care for. In all Santo Tomas Moro had 25,000 Catholics. The parish also had a very poor area of squatters who were living very near the city garbage dump. People lived in houses of cardboard with a little bit of tin on their roofs. On September 9, 1987, Father Keefe was officially installed by Archbishop Suarez as pastor of Santo Tomas Moro parish. The parishioners were very happy because for the first time in over a year they had a full-time pastor, an

associate pastor and a new religious congregation at the parish.<sup>xi</sup>

## **VI. A Difficult Beginning for the New Mission**

In August of 198<sup>9</sup>~~8~~, the new provincial, Father Leonard Collins, was faced with a real crisis. The young priest, Father Edward Kaufman, who had been an important part of the decision to take the large parish in the Archdiocese of Monterrey asked Father Collins for a leave of absence from ministry. Father Kaufman's request, of course created many difficulties for his pastor, Father Keefe, for the people of Santo Tomas Moro parish and for the Southern Province. Immediately Father Barry Cabell,

a Holy Cross Brother who had been ordained a priest only four months earlier, and who was working in a Counseling Ministry in San Antonio, was asked to help Father Keefe with Masses and Sacraments for a nine month period. Also, a seminarian from the Indiana Province, Bruce Cecil, who was doing a pastoral year with Father Keefe, helped with Celebrations of the Word, visits to the sick and many other duties. Then, in November, Father Collins talked to Father Logsdon, by this time Rector of St. Mary's Cathedral, about going to Santo Tomas Moro Parish as Associate Pastor. The new assignment would not begin until following summer. Fr. Logsdon agreed.<sup>xii</sup>

When the time came to find a replacement for Fr.

Logsdon at St. Mary's Cathedral it was decided that to move anyone would create more problems. And so, after 116 years of service to St. Mary's, the administration of the Cathedral was turned over to the Diocese of Austin. As Father Logsdon recalled his last day at St. Mary's: " I walked out of the Church that Father Sorin had built and I handed the keys to the Vicar General of the Diocese. It was a sad day for Holy Cross in Austin but it was a real commitment to the newest venture of the Congregation of Holy Cross in Mexico.

From 1987 to 1996 Santo Tomas Moro parish grew rapidly. Father Keefe created five new chapels all around the parish including one called 'Santa Cruz' in the poorest area by the garbage dump. Father

Keefe tells the story that he once proposed that the name of the chapel be changed to a Saint's name but the people resisted. "We are part of the Congregation of Santa Cruz" , they said, "and that is our name".<sup>xiii</sup>

## **VII. More Growth in Mexico**

In 1992 Father Daniel Panchot arrived in Mexico from Peru to begin a Vocation and Formation Program that has, so far, produced four Holy Cross Priests. As of today, there is one seminarian in Final Vows and six seminarians in Initial Formation.

In January, 1994 Sister Jacinta Millan CSC arrived to work in the parish and six months later Sister

Charlotte LeBoef MSC joined her. In January, 1995 Sister Joan Mader CSC and Sister Michelle Toepp CSC arrived at Santo Tomas Moro parish. In 2002, the Sisters of the Holy Cross began a vocation and formation program. That same year Sister Patricia Clossey CSC arrived to do formation work. There are now six Sisters of the Holy Cross from Mexico.

By 1996 Santo Tomas Moro parish had more than 50,000 members. So the parish was divided and Holy Cross chose to take the newer and poorer part which became "Nuestra Madre Santisima de La Luz." Holy Cross withdrew from Santo Tomas Moro and Fr. Logsdon was named pastor of the new parish.<sup>xiv</sup> La Luz parish, as it is called today, continued to grow from 25,000 to 40,000

members.

After completing his term as Provincial, Father Leonard Collins arrived in Mexico in 1997 to do formation. For the next ten years, the new provincial of the Southern Province, Fr. John Korcsmar, who had arrived in Austin back in 1976, continued to support the Missions in Mexico with personnel, financing and helpful visits.

In 1999 La Luz Parish began to receive groups of young people from various works of the Congregation. Over the next ten years the parish hosted 80 groups who came to learn about the people and culture of Mexico. Those groups included young people from: Holy Cross High School in San Antonio, St. Edward's University, Kings College, St. Mary's

College, Notre Dame University, Holy Cross College, Notre Dame High School in Chicago, Holy Family Parish and St. Ignatius Parish in Austin and a combined group from Moreau and St. Francis High Schools in Northern California. This “Immersion Program” had to be suspended when the violence in Northern Mexico made it unsafe for groups to go. Also, in 1999, Father Panchot began his work with Family Rosary of Mexico.

## **VIII. The Indiana Province Takes Over**

On December 12, 2006, the Southern Province rejoined the Indiana Province.<sup>xv</sup> The date was chosen at the Extraordinary General Chapter to honor Our Lady

of Guadalupe. The great hope of those working in Hispanic Ministry was that Holy Cross' work in Texas and Mexico would continue to be a priority.

### **US Province Update on Mexico: 2006-2013**

In 2007, Fr. Tom Zurcher arrived in Mexico to take over the Formation Program. In 2010, Holy Cross took over the administration of San Jose Parish in Taman, San Luis Potosi so that once again Holy Cross has two parishes in Mexico. In fact, San Jose parish is very near Father Schmidt's parish in the state of San Luis Potosi. Father Marin Hernandez and Father Paulino Antonio both grew up in San Jose Parish. They take care of 60 chapels, most of which are in the mountains. Half of the chapels have

indigenous populations. In 2011, as the Indiana Province and the Eastern Province were merging into the US Province, Father John Herman was named Pastor of La Luz parish. Today the parish has grown to 45,000 members.

Therefore the two Holy Cross Mission Parishes, the Vocation and Formation programs of the priests and sisters, as well as that of the Holy Cross Family Ministries, continue to be strong in Mexico.

My hope is that this paper shows that Holy Cross in Mexico has its historical roots “Deep in the Heart of Texas”. --- Peter Logsdon CSC

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## ENDNOTES:

<sup>i</sup> William Dunn, C.S.C., *The Finest Country in the World: The Brothers and Priests of Holy Cross in Texas, 1870-1983* (Notre Dame, Indiana: Province Archives Center, 1985), p. 3

<sup>ii</sup> *ibid.* p. 5

<sup>iii</sup> Rev. Christopher J. O'Toole CSC, *Holy Cross in the South: A Perspective* (New Orleans, 1983) p.3

<sup>iv</sup> Records, (US Province Archive Center, Notre Dame, IN)

<sup>v</sup> See "Holy Cross in Texas, 1874-1974", (US Province Archives Center, Notre Dame, IN), p. 4

<sup>vi</sup> William Dunn, CSC, "The Finest Country in the World", pp. 26-35

<sup>vii</sup> Rev. Christopher J. O'Toole CSC, *Holy Cross in the South: A perspective*, pp. 7-9

<sup>ix</sup> Provincial Council Minutes, Sept. 1973, Southern Province (US Province Archive Center, Notre Dame, IN)

<sup>x</sup> Provincial Council Minutes, Nov. 1986, Southern Province (US Province, Archive Center, Notre Dame, IN)

<sup>xi</sup> Provincial Council Minutes, May, 1987, Southern Province (US Province Archive Center, Notre Dame, IN)

<sup>xii</sup> Provincial Council Minutes, Nov. 1990, Southern Province (US Province Archive Center, Notre Dame, IN)

<sup>xiii</sup> Story told to author in person.

<sup>xiv</sup> Provincial Council Minutes, June, 1996, Southern Province (US Province Archive Center, Notre Dame, IN)

<sup>xv</sup> Extraordinary General Chapter of 2006, Rome, Italy