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A History of the Holy Cross Mission Band

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The purpose of this presentation is to present the history of the Holy Cross Mission Band, from its conception to its death. I will chronicle the birth of the Holy Cross Mission Band, give a brief history of its existence, and finally examine some of the reasons for its collapse in the decades following the Second Vatican Council.

A Hobby Apostolate

The majority of American parish mission activity took place in the 1800's, and had its roots in the revivalism that swept through parts of Europe in the 18th and 19th centuries. The parish mission mainly served the purpose of renewal. Religious orders oversaw the majority of parish missions in America. Religious priests had the freedom to move about the country and explore apostolates outside everyday parish life. The two most notable orders in the US that worked on parish missions were the Redemptorists (formed primarily for the purpose of preaching and giving parish missions) and the Jesuits.¹

The Congregation of Holy Cross had its own part to play in the Catholic revival movement. Coming to the US in the mid-19th century, the Congregation's primary apostolate was teaching in schools and working in local parishes. However, as more priests and brothers arrived in the US, more opportunities for unique apostolates began to surface. In the late 19th Century, there are records of individual efforts at parish missions within the Congregation. The first known missionary was Rev. William Mahoney, C.S.C., who preached missions in the summers during his service to the community at Sacred Heart College in Watertown, Wisconsin.² There is also a mention in the 1887 Provincial Chapter that several priests embraced a part-time ministry preaching parish missions. It mentions that Rev.

¹ Ibid, 38-40.

² Memoirs, File on Rev. Richard Collentine, C.S.C., USA Province Archives.

Daniel Spillard C.S.C. and Rev. John Toohey C.S.C. had formed a part-time mission band, and that Rev. Peter Cooney C.S.C. preached mission sermons of “great thunder and length.”³ It seems that these ministries were never full-time, merely undertaken in the calmer parts of the school year.

In 1892, two priests formed a part-time band that served several parts of the country. Rev. Peter Klein C.S.C. headed the two-man band of himself and Rev. Michael Lauth C.S.C., and for a decade they preached a mission every year or two. A detailed record of their actions was discovered in Old College in 1952 when the Mission Band was moving out of that building.⁴ Rev. Klein recorded each mission in great detail. Their first mission was held at Notre Dame, and served the local Catholics from South Bend. It was one week long in mid-November. Despite the cold and rainy weather, 30 families walked from town to attend the mission at Sacred Heart Church.

During the following decade, they preached four more missions, each one larger than the one before it. In 1896, Klein recorded a mission in Beaumont, Texas and claimed the mission to be a “great success.” During the course of this mission, Klein was called on to perform an exorcism in the parish, which he writes about with little flair. In 1897, the two priests preached a mission in Liberty, Texas. In 1898, Rev. Henchmer (who was formerly Brother Anthony of the Congregation of Holy Cross) invited the missionaries to his parish in Gainesville, Texas. Klein listed the mission as a great success, as the entire parish attended the Sacrament of Reconciliation (except for “one renegade German”).

The final mission recorded by Klein took place in March of 1900, at St. Mary’s of the Annunciation Parish in Chicago. The mission lasted two weeks, and Klein claimed it to be an

³ Provincial Chapters, 1881-1916, USA Province Archives.

⁴ “Chronicles 1892-1900” in file “Mission Band-House Chronicles”, USA Province Archives.

“unprecedented success.” Several extra priests had to assist, including the Mission Band’s eventual founder, Rev. James French C.S.C. He exhaustively recorded several stories from this mission in the Chronicle. For instance, after entrusting to St. Joseph the return of one particular parishioner to the church, Klein saw this parishioner at his sermon the following day. After this experience, he wrote a homily on St. Joseph that was so passionate that it inspired 600 parishioners to buy small St. Joseph statues to keep in their pockets. Additionally, at the end of the two weeks the entire parish was enrolled in the scapular and many alcoholics took the temperance pledge, promising to fight their addiction through prayer and proper medical help.

In the first few years of the 20th century, Klein became ill and the part-time band fell apart. For about ten years after the Chicago mission, there is no record of any priest preaching parish missions. Focus at Notre Dame seemed to be shifting towards academics, and fewer young priests were interested in itinerant preaching. Professors had neither the interest nor the time to preach missions as a hobby, as some had done before them. It seemed like the hobby apostolate of parish missions would fade away from the Congregation.

The Birth of the Mission Band

The priests who preached missions in the years before 1912 were not formally assigned to do so. Parish missions were not an apostolate of the Congregation, so no one served as a missionary full-time. Therefore, no parish missionary activity is recorded during the first decade of the 20th century, as the ill health or death of those involved meant the death of the apostolate as well. But though the activity fell dormant during those years,

zeal for parish missions did not disappear from the Congregation. Rev. James French's experience on the 1900 Chicago mission remained with him, and though his time was thoroughly spoken for during those years, he began to plan for the possibility of reviving the apostolate in the future.

In order to discuss the creation of the Mission Band, it will be necessary to briefly introduce the heated politics of Notre Dame at the beginning of the 20th century. The Mission Band is one of a host of apostolates that was affected by the tempestuous relationship of two influential priests at Notre Dame, Rev. Andrew Morrissey C.S.C. and Rev. John Zahm C.S.C.⁵

Morrissey and Zahm both had extraordinary influence at Notre Dame, though they were two very different men with very different visions for the University. Morrissey wanted to focus more on the high school and undergraduate college, slowly developing the already existing academic structure. He was extremely fiscally conscious and uncomfortable with taking on new debt. Zahm, on the other hand, had a vision for Notre Dame as a model graduate institution of higher learning, and was willing to embrace debt to expedite expansion. Morrissey wanted to push young priests immediately into teaching and ministry, whereas Zahm wanted them to go into higher studies and become lettered scholars. Zahm was close to the Superior General, Rev. Francois C.S.C., and convinced him that Notre Dame had a high potential for a developed graduate program. When the provincial, Rev. Corby C.S.C., passed away in 1897, Rev. Francois replaced him with Zahm in

⁵ My account of Zahm and Morrissey comes from two sources: first, the book Notre Dame-One Hundred Years by Arthur Hope, C.S.C. (pg. 260-279) and second, a biographical sketch of Rev. French, also written by Hope, found in French's personal file in the Province Archives.

order to promote further studies in the province. Zahm did not waste time, and immediately sent several priests into higher studies.

Over the next few years, Morrissey (who was President of Notre Dame) and Zahm continuously clashed over the direction of the university. Zahm lacked tact in his arguments, his cold and guileless attitude often making enemies amongst his colleagues. On campus, a rift began to form in the community, as members began to take sides in the constant struggle between President and Provincial. Morrissey's closest friend in those years was Rev. French, and French therefore fell into Morrissey's camp. In 1905, Morrissey became convinced that he and Zahm could not continue working together, and submitted his resignation before Zahm could request it. Zahm assigned him to a yearlong sabbatical in Europe. To Morrissey, the assignment seemed more like banishment than reprieve, but he left for France that year without complaint. The young friend and protégé of Zahm, Rev. John Cavanaugh C.S.C, replaced Morrissey as president of the university. During this time, French's designs for starting a mission band were not entertained by his superiors. In 1905, as the confidante of Morrissey and one of his outspoken supporters, French too was removed from Notre Dame and reassigned to St. Joseph's College in Cincinnati. Zahm and Cavanaugh strongly encouraged young priests to pursue higher studies, and a mission band was not seen as a worthwhile expenditure of resources and manpower. It is likely that the Mission Band would have been founded sooner if not for this turbulent political environment.

However, the situation at Notre Dame quickly reversed itself. Morrissey made the most of his time in Europe, befriending Francois and convincing him that Zahm was financially reckless and unfit for service as Provincial. The next year, the Provincial Council

voted Zahm out of the head position, replacing him with Morrissey. Zahm was reassigned to a different part of the country, and would never return to an apostolate at the University of Notre Dame.

Morrissey then tasked French with the project of making a plan for a mission band. Planning took several years. Both Morrissey and Francais encouraged his efforts, pledging to implement them as soon as he was ready. French was not considering a simple reboot of the part-time missions of the past, hoping instead that the new band would be a full-time ministry with its own residence and superior. He researched parish missions undertaken by other religious orders, and began assessing seminarians for the qualities necessary for missionary preaching. Then the Provincial Chapter met in 1912. The Chapter opened with a circular letter read by the Superior General. In the letter, he expressed his desire that a mission band be formed in the US:

Our rules say that the end our congregation has in view is not only the Christian instruction and the education of youth, but also preaching, giving missions, the apostolate of the Divine Word. Not all Fathers of Holy Cross are called to classrooms or to the prefectures of our colleges. Has the time not come for us to begin the carrying out of this religious program God has drawn up for us? There has been in the past in each of our provinces something done in this sense, but the attempts are feeble, transitory and incomplete, producing no lasting fruit. This part of our work remains to be completed in its entirety.⁶

One of the first items of discussion, therefore, was the creation of a mission band. After some disagreement, the Council decided to make French the superior of an autonomous and self-supporting ministry, and invited him to the council to share his preparations. He was

⁶ Circular Letters of Very Rev. Gilbert Francais, Notre Dame, IN, pg 363.

given the Old College building as a residence (against the protests of Cavanaugh, who wanted to make the building a pseudo-shrine Rev. Edward Sorin C.S.C. He reportedly said that using “the Old College building was like using Mt. Vernon as an apartment house.”⁷), as well as three promising newly-ordained priests⁸ to begin the full-time work of parish missions.

That summer, the four priests moved into Old College (which had been renamed the Mission House), and began to prepare for their ministry. French had high expectations for the new apostolate. He laid down very strict rules for the young priests. His demands (in order of importance) were outstanding piety and regularity in prayer, intelligence, and finally the gift of writing and delivering sermons.⁹ Their time together was seen as training for their time in the mission. He expected the highest performance of etiquette and table manners at every meal, and never granted an exception to the rigorous community prayer schedule. They practiced writing and delivering sermons, coaching one another on techniques. French placed a heavy emphasis on confession, known himself for being a “rigorist” in the confessional. It was not unusual for him to yell at the penitent, sometimes exclaiming, “You ought to be horsewhipped!” However, he was also known for his kindness to especially promiscuous or grave sinners.¹⁰

The missionaries were coached exactly how to behave at every mission. They were to arrive just before supper the night of the mission, in order to avoid interfering with the pastor’s duties in the rectory during the day. They were never to engage in gossip,

⁷ Collentine, memoirs.

⁸ Rev. Joseph Boyle C.S.C., Rev. Wendell Corcoran C.S.C., and Rev. James Donahue C.S.C.

⁹ Hope, biography of Rev. French, personal file on Rev. James French, USA Province Archives.

¹⁰ Ibid.

especially about clergy both at home and in the parish where the mission took place. No recreation was permitted during a mission, and absolutely no alcohol was allowed. After a sermon, they were not allowed to fish for compliments or ask how many people attended. After the last sermon, they were to depart immediately for Notre Dame. They were permitted to sleep late the morning after their return, but were expected at the regular community prayer after that.¹¹ French was strict with the young men, but for a purpose. He hoped that by training them to be well-behaved and pious men, they would be better preachers because their instruction would be exemplified by their daily lives.

Fr. French was a saintly man himself. He kept a strict schedule of prayer, and was extremely detailed in his understanding of liturgical praxis. He was known in the Congregation for his skill at the pulpit, and a chorus of sobs often accompanied the silence following his sermon. Arthur Hope writes about his preaching:

He had a great voice range, magnificent volume, and change of pace. He had no trouble with monotonous cadence. When he'd hit a climax, you'd feel like applauding. When he'd imitate the rabble yelling, 'Crucify Him!' it made the columns rumble.¹²

French was a skilled mentor to the young missionaries, and within a few years the Band gained a reputation for its excellence in preaching.

In the early years, the Band faced opposition on Notre Dame's campus. Many of the priests did not appreciate the work of the missionaries, and community events often witnessed banter between teachers and preachers. The teachers would claim that if you weren't intelligent enough to preach, then you'd become a missionary. The missionaries

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Hope, biography of Rev. French.

would retort, saying that if you were a lousy homilist, then you'd become a teacher. French never allowed this sort of banter in his presence, scolding the missionaries for engaging in such competitive dialogue.

French designed the mission based on the work of Rev. Klein before him and the advice of Rev. Daniel Quinn S.J. of the New York Jesuit Mission Band.¹³ The missionaries would arrive at the parish over the weekend, and a mission would last one or two weeks. They usually went in pairs, unless a mission was large enough to merit extra help. If the mission lasted more than one week, then usually the first week was the women's mission and the second week the men's. On the first evening (usually Saturday) one of the missionaries preached an introductory sermon. They constructed a large wooden cross and placed it behind the pulpit. The cross was a visual sign of the mission. Parishioners were encouraged to pray in front of the cross throughout the week, and it was left in the church for months afterward to remind the people of the renewal they experienced during the mission. Every day the missionaries preached two sermons, one of them preaching in the mornings and the other in the evenings. In the early years, topics included: "Importance of Salvation" "Sin and its terrible consequences" "Confession" "Contrition and Satisfaction" "Scandal" "Death" "Prayer and its conditions" "Judgment" "Sacrifice of the Mass" "Hell" "Holy Communion" "Impurity" "Devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary" "Heaven" and "Christian Perseverance".¹⁴ Confessions were held at the end of the week, separated into specific times for children, then women, and finally men (later on, the missionaries began to offer

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ "Chronicles 1892-1900" in file "Mission Band-House Chronicles", USA Province Archives.

confession every night¹⁵). On the closing Sunday, all the parishioners were especially encouraged to receive the Eucharist, and that evening the mission cross was blessed, people were enrolled in the scapular and various societies, and were given the opportunity to take a pledge of abstinence from alcohol.

A Profitable Apostolate

The first few years witnessed a slow start for the Mission Band. They preached missions in small parishes in Indiana, Michigan, and Ohio, but also gave many forty-hours devotions locally. The missionaries also assisted local religious communities by giving retreats at convents and seminaries. In 1913 the Band received its first big break. An urgent request for a mission came in from Morrissey's friend Rev. Frank O'Brien, who was the pastor of St. Augustine's Parish in Kalamazoo, Michigan. O'Brien was an old friend of the Congregation, and had received some financial aid from Fr. Sorin in the past. O'Brien felt indebted to Holy Cross, and it is probable that Morrissey asked O'Brien to invite the Mission Band to Kalamazoo. St. Augustine's was a large parish, and many of the priests in Detroit were friends with O'Brien. The mission required all four members of the Band, and lasted two weeks.¹⁶ Several thousand people attended the mission, and French was extremely pleased with the event.¹⁷

The Kalamazoo Mission attracted the attention of many priests in Detroit, and the Band's schedule began to fill quickly. Soon, French began to search for additions to the community. In 1915, Italy's entrance into World War I forced several Holy Cross religious

¹⁵ Interview of Rev. Walter L. McInerney C.S.C. by Rev. Thomas Blantz C.S.C. on September 4, 2003.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Kehoe, Joseph. The Holy Cross Mission Band. June, 1988, 8.

to return from their studies in Rome. Two of these young priests, Rev. Richard Collentine C.S.C. and Rev. George Finnigan C.S.C., finished their studies in Canada and joined the Mission Band in 1916. In 1917, Finnigan entered the Army as a Chaplain, and he was replaced by another young priest, Rev. Bernard Malloy, C.S.C. From this time on, the Mission Band grew rapidly, enjoying the service of many priests and brothers of Holy Cross.

After six years of dedicated service, the Mission Band caught the eye of Fr. Cavanaugh. He recognized the significant contribution the band made to the prestige of the Congregation, and began to soften toward French.¹⁸ In an act of good will, he suggested a joint project between the two. He expressed his willingness to organize a laymen's retreat on campus, and asked French to provide a retreat master. French was happy to cooperate, and the plans were made. However, the first retreat in 1918 was a disaster. Poor advertisement resulted in a total of only two registered retreatants. In a last minute rush, several young priests in the Band scrambled to find seven more retreatants so as not to embarrass French. Some of the last minute recruits included Frank Graf (the university gardener), the twenty-year-old John J. Cavanaugh (future president of Notre Dame, but no relation to the sitting president John W. Cavanaugh), and university day laborer Johnny Martin (who would grow close to John J. Cavanaugh and one day be the university president's chauffeur). John W. Cavanaugh wrote a personal apology to French, and removed himself from future retreat planning. The next year only one retreatant signed up, and the retreat was cancelled. In 1920, the retreat planning was handed over to the Mission Band, and it was a large success. More than 200 men attended the retreat planned by Rev. Boyle,

¹⁸ Kehoe, 9.

and every following year its attendance grew.¹⁹ By 1941, the retreat reached a record of more than 2000 attendees, and the retreat master was Rev. Corcoran (who had been forced to cancel the one-man retreat 22 years earlier).²⁰

Over the years, though the mission band was generally comprised of young priests, the superior was always an older priest. French served as superior of the Band until 1919, when the Code of Canon Law required that he step down. Rev. Boyle took his place, though during Boyle's tenure French remained with the Band and often acted as its unofficial leader. In 1923, French was reappointed as superior of the Mission Band. In 1928, French's health began to slide and he decided to step down completely. He was named chaplain at St. Joseph's Hospital in South Bend, where he lived the remainder of his active service before entering Holy Cross House in 1936. Rev. Collentine (now a twelve year veteran of the Band) took over control. Between Collentine and Rev. Patrick Dolan C.S.C., the band was in good hands for the next 18 years.²¹

During the first several decades of the Mission Band's life, the constant stream of mission requests was more than the missionaries could handle. Missions were served in all parts of the country, from Massachusetts to Iowa, Texas to California, Idaho to Washington D.C. By the middle of the century, there were few major cities in the US yet untouched by the Holy Cross Mission Band. There were even several overseas missions in Europe and Japan preached during WWII. ²² The Mission Band not only helped the parishes it served, but also raised awareness for the Congregation. Rev. Kehoe recalls that during his formation in Holy Cross in the 1920's, the largest contingent of the 200 seminarians in

¹⁹ Collentine, memoirs.

²⁰ Kehoe, 10.

²¹ Collentine, memoirs.

²² Kehoe, 13.

formation heard of Holy Cross through a mission in their parish. The missionaries regularly called on the seminary to visit the young men they had inspired to join Holy Cross, encouraging their enthusiasm for the priesthood.²³ They also became popular with other religious orders. For instance, several Josephite pastors were so enamored with the missionaries that they began inviting the Mission Band to preach the annual Josephite Retreat.²⁴ When a priest fell ill or was injured (like in 1940 when Collentine survived a car accident after being reelected superior) the Band felt its belt tighten. They were constantly spread thin, and losing a priest often meant postponing a mission.²⁵ When operating at full capacity, the missionaries usually returned from a mission and had no more than a week before they were sent out again. Often, a pair would leave for a new mission only several days after their last one ended.²⁶ Missionaries often took initiative when visiting a new city, asking around if any parish was interested in hosting them in the future.²⁷

The apostolate expanded so quickly that several satellite bands were formed. In 1928, the sheer amount of missions in Texas prompted the appointment of Rev. Bernard Mulloy C.S.C. to a full-time residence at St. Edward's University in Austin. He preached missions in Louisiana and Texas, often requiring assistance from Notre Dame. In turn, during the times when the summer heat of Texas refused to allow travel, he went to Chicago to help with the constant requests there.²⁸ Out East, the growing number of missions in New England sparked a spinoff of eight priests from the Mission Band at Notre Dame. The

²³ Ibid, 10.

²⁴ Collentine, memoirs.

²⁵ Kehoe, 12.

²⁶ Interview of Rev. Walter L. McInerney C.S.C. by Rev. Thomas Blantz C.S.C. on September 4, 2003.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Kehoe, 11.

Eastern Mission Band was formed in Massachusetts, finding a permanent home in North Easton in 1935. It served as a branch of the Indiana Band until the separation of the Eastern and Indiana provinces in 1945.²⁹

Just like the case of the Josephite Annual Retreat, the Mission Band also became increasingly active in the ministry of leading retreats. Their first and most popular retreat was the laymen's retreat at Notre Dame, but the annual retreats were canceled in 1942 due to the war effort. In its place, eight smaller retreats were held on campus in the seminary. They varied in size, averaging around 40 retreatants each. The next year, out of deference to the Sisters who were overworked in the kitchen, they only held one retreat.³⁰

During World War II, the Mission Band aided the war effort by assisting in the spiritual service of the armed forces. Several missions were held for troops overseas, and even more were held at bases and training camps in the US. One in particular occurred in November of 1944 at Fort Benning in Georgia. Eight missionaries were needed to hold the mission, and the missionaries used the assistance of all the Catholic chaplains on the base as well. The mission lasted two weeks, the first week for the military men and then the second for the women who lived at the post, both military and civilian.³¹

A New Home and a Time of Decline

By the end of the War, the band had existed for almost 35 years. It had grown from a small outfit of four dedicated priests to a cross-country coordinated effort. It brought in a steady stream of vocations and supported itself monetarily, almost always ending the year

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Collentine, memoirs.

³¹ Ibid.

with a profit. In 1946, Collentine stepped down from the role of superior, replaced by Rev. Thomas Richards C.S.C. With the ascent of Richards to superior of the Mission Band, the apostolate was primed to expand even more. He brought with him a drive to grow and a new focus that would prove instrumental to shaping the history of the Band.

Richards' first priority was the reintroduction of the laymen's retreat. In his first year he put Rev. Michael Foran C.S.C. in charge, and preparations began immediately. In 1947, the Band hosted the first laymen's retreat on Notre Dame's campus since America's entry into the War. It was immensely successful, with 1400 in attendance. Each following year the number grew, and by 1950 almost 2000 men made their way to Notre Dame for the retreat.³² Legend held that on the final day, when the retreat master gave the closing sermon under an oak tree by the grotto, his voice could be heard across campus. Regardless, in 1948 the crowds grew so large that they began to use microphones.

The retreat movement gained popularity in the US, and the Mission Band was one of its leaders. Holy Cross was favored by many religious orders for their annual retreats. A survey of Collentine's sermons, which were kept in a series of notebooks that now reside in the US Province Archives, reveals that he spent almost half of his time specifically preaching to religious men and women.³³ Dioceses began to call on the Band as well, requesting retreats for their clergy. For instance, in 1959 the Diocese of Fort Wayne began the practice of an annual retreat, and brought in the Mission Band to oversee it. That year, Collentine described the retreat movement as "burgeoning".³⁴ Increasingly, the missionaries' time was split between preaching missions and giving retreats. For instance, Rev. Foran found that

³² Ibid.

³³ Collentine's Personal File, USA Province Archives.

³⁴ Collentine, memoirs.

he had almost no time for missions, as he spent more and more of his time planning and leading the annual laymen's retreat.³⁵

By the middle of the century, the Band had grown so large that it became apparent that a new Mission House was needed. The group had long outgrown the Old College building, spilling over to Corby Hall and Moreau Seminary. Richards hoped to bring the entire band together in one building. He also recognized the explosion of the retreat movement, and hoped to build a space that could house retreats as well. In 1950, with the approval of the Provincial, he announced plans for an extensive building project. The plans called for a massive 2-story structure that included a chapel, accommodations for 20 missionaries, a retreat house with 100 rooms, and a shrine to Our Lady of Fatima. It would be located on U.S. Highway 31 across from the entrance to St. Mary's College. The estimated cost of the project was \$400,000. In June, an anonymous donation of \$50,000 kicked off the funding campaign.³⁶ The Provincial expected the project to be entirely funded by donations and revenues from missions and retreats.³⁷ This was a reasonable demand; the Band's operating budget was already much lower than its income. Still, the missionaries redoubled their efforts and took on more missions in order to expedite the funding of a new building.³⁸ Richards hoped to begin construction within the year, and immediately began clearing the site of weeds and bramble. He posted a sign announcing the proposed construction saying, "Site of the Shrine of Our Lady of Fatima, of the Mission House, and the Retreat House."³⁹

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ South Bend Tribune, June 10, 1950.

³⁷ Collentine, memoirs.

³⁸ Interview of Rev. Walter L. McInerney C.S.C. by Rev. Thomas Blantz C.S.C. on September 4, 2003.

³⁹ Collentine, memoirs.

However, the funding campaign was slower than expected, and the construction was deferred. Still in desperate need of a new residence, the Band purchased a home in Evanston, Illinois in 1951. The home was 4 stories tall and had 20 rooms, large enough to house the entire Band. This served as the base of operations during the construction. They moved out of the old Mission House, officially restoring the name of the building to "Old College". Rev. Charles Callahan C.S.C, who was already in charge of overseeing the building project, took over as superior in 1952. The band expected to move back to Notre Dame by 1955, and therefore sold the Evanston residence that year to help pay for the construction. However, complications arose in the building, delaying the completion until 1956. Having sold the Evanston home, the Band was forced to vacate the property and spent a year in the faculty residence of Notre Dame High School in Niles, Illinois. Finally, they moved into the new Mission House and Retreat Center in 1956. The community called the building "Fatima House".⁴⁰

Though a joyful occasion, the new home marked the beginning of decline for the Mission Band. It testified to the success of the group, but also to an important shift in focus. Decline happened slowly, over the course of several decades, but the first factor in the falling amount of parish missions was the retreat movement. Though preaching missions was its primary service, the Band increasingly devoted more and more time and manpower to leading retreats. The half-million dollar new home (dominated by the Retreat Center) was a physical testament to this change. In the early 60's, the Mission Band's Superior, Rev. Richard Kennedy C.S.C., expressed his growing frustration about the integrity of the Mission Band. Young men leaving the seminary were now allowed more input in the conversation

⁴⁰ Collentine, memoirs.

about their assignments. Few chose to enter the Mission Band.⁴¹ Many young priests, however, were extremely interested in the retreat movement, and the giving of retreats slowly eclipsed the preaching of missions. On top of this shift, some of the older members of the Band began seeking assignments elsewhere.

The preference for retreats over missions coincided with another movement in the Church that accelerated the decline of the practice of parish missions in the late 60's and early 70's. The Second Vatican Council stressed the importance of fostering lay leadership at a parish level, and everywhere in the country new parish councils were formed. In the early 20th century, many dioceses required that a pastor have a mission in the parish at least once a decade. After Vatican II, this was rare. In the wake of Vatican II each parish was required to have a parish council, and these councils played an important part in the choices of a parish.⁴² Parish councils seemed less concerned with hosting missions than with the social life and service of the church. Education took a back seat to social justice and lay leadership. In 1964, Rev. Robert Sweeney C.S.C. recommended the closure of the small mission band he directed in California, saying that the missionaries' time would be better-spent training laity for leadership instead of instructing them on spiritual matters. The Band remained, but by the early 70's they could no longer find any missions to preach. In 1971, the California part of the Band broke up and its members sought other apostolates.⁴³

In the 1970's, Rev. Charles Callahan C.S.C. (the last official superior assigned to the Band) believed that the parish mission movement was becoming obsolete. Parish councils showed a lack of interest for hosting missions. Articles in Catholic journals began to surface

⁴¹ Kehoe, 17.

⁴² Ibid, 19.

⁴³ Ibid, 18.

that attacked the practice of parish missions, calling it an outdated practice that was no longer needed in the Church.⁴⁴ Rev Joseph Kehoe, C.S.C. wrote a brief history of the Mission Band in the 80's and attributed the dissolution of the band to the aims of parish councils. He claims that missions, concerned with moral instruction and conversion, had nothing to do with the ambitions of a parish council, which sought to foster the individual's responsibility for resolving social problems. In the 70's, the crushing blow to parish missions came with the advent of the Charismatic Movement. The Movement focused on a person's experience of grace in the Holy Spirit, and was fed through prayer groups and short retreats. The parish mission's focus on the suffering of the Passion and the necessity of a strict moral life had no place in the Movement. The Mission Band disintegrated. By the early 80's, the preaching of parish missions returned to its infant state in Holy Cross as a hobby apostolate undertaken by a few retreat masters in their spare time.

The Mission Band was a unique and fruitful apostolate of Holy Cross. Many members of the Congregation happily made the Mission Band their life's work, serving the people of God, increasing the community's notoriety across the country, and attracting a large amount of vocations to Holy Cross. The Band's dissolution was a product of the times, as local focus shifted from catechesis to service. However, at present there seems to be a resurgence of devotions to the Passion and a craving for religious instruction. Examples include the recent success of programs like Rev. Robert Baron's Catholicism series and the plethora of instructive internet blogs. Furthermore, there has been a rebirth of itinerant groups that go

⁴⁴ Kehoe references two articles, "A Hard Look at the Parish Mission" by April Oursler Armstrong in an issue of Priest Magazine, and "Parish Mission Outdated?" by Rev. Dennis Geaney O.S.A. in Worship magazine.

into parishes and lead retreats like NET Ministries and Totus Tuus. The popularity of these programs, *especially among young people*, could translate into a reappearance of the parish mission in the future. Could it be that in the near future we might see the Congregation of Holy Cross, a storied leader in the parish mission and retreat movements, look to take up its leadership role in these ministries once again? Only time will tell.

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