

History of the Midwest Province of Brothers

(Nov. 1956 – 2026/28?)

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**43rd Annual Holy Cross History Association Conference
June 14-15, 1024
Holy Cross College
Notre Dame, Indiana**

Although Brothers of Holy Cross, with their superior, Fr. Edward Sorin, established roots in 1841, they were French missionaries to a then missionary territory who soon attracted new members from among other immigrants to this country. It was not until 1851 that Basil Moreau and his council in France determined that the Holy Cross religious in the United States had grown sufficient members and ministries to warrant province status. This new Province lasted nearly 100 years, yet could not avoid serious crises that threatened the unity of the Congregation. Alternately, the Society of the Brothers (1910) and the Society of the Priests (1932) petitioned Rome to end Fr. Moreau's intended union and make each an independent congregation. Several General Chapters failed to settle the friction between Brothers and Priests. Superior General Albert Cousineau led the General Chapter of 1945 to resolve the disharmony by establishing distinct provinces for the Society of Priests and the Society of Brothers, each Province having its own Provincial Superior while maintaining Congregational unity at the General Administration level.

Slide 1 The new Brothers' Province, the United States Province of Brothers of Holy Cross, created in September 1946, was responsible for nearly two dozen ministries in states of the Midwest but also states south, west, and east. This brothers' Province thrived under the administration of Brother Ephrem O'Dwyer, its first Provincial. He was a leader of great energy and ability who added eighteen new brothers' ministries between 1946 and 1956. He led the reorganization of the formation program for hundreds of young men who entered the Brothers of Holy Cross in the years following World War II, doubling their numbers to more than one thousand in vows.

By 1956, it was evident that the growing number of brothers and their ministries required new organizational governance structures in the United States. Thus, on November 1, the Midwest Province came into existence along with the South-West Vice-Province and the Eastern Vice-Province, which quickly became provinces. Slide 2 The Midwest Province continued to have its headquarters at Notre Dame, Indiana, and its leadership was entrusted to Brother Donatus Schmitz, a man who had worked both in the schools and in formation. The Provincial Council, which had been meeting in Columba Hall, purchased the property and a residence in South Bend, Indiana, on Jefferson Boulevard. The Midwest Province Council worked and lived in this location until 1963 when they moved into a newly constructed provincial administration headquarters with residence and offices on land they owned across from the University of Notre Dame campus on what is now Highway 933.

The first new ministry of the Midwest Province was not on American soil but rather in Ghana, West Africa. Over the years, the Midwest Province supplied dozens of men from the U.S. to West Africa. New ministries were taken on in Ghana and Liberia, another West African country. Vocation formation programs were initiated in Ghana, and Ghanaian Brothers took vows, the first in 1967. That same year, the General Chapter established the District of West Africa. On January 1, 2023, after 66 years as a Midwest Province ministry, the District of West Africa became the Province of West Africa. As a way of assuring the sustainability of the new Province, the Midwest established a trust designed to provide adequate funding for normal operations with a bit of a cushion for eventual additional funding.

United States Brothers, with Brothers from France and Canada, had been present in Asia since almost the beginning of the Holy Cross Bengal mission, and the Midwest Province

continued to see this mission as a priority throughout its history. Unfortunately, there are no North American or French Holy Cross Brothers in Asia today.

In 1964, the Midwest Province was strong: 399 finally professed brothers, 100 temporarily professed, and 49 novices. Province schools included: Holy Trinity High School in Chicago, IL (1910), Cathedral High School in Indianapolis, IN (1918), Reitz Memorial in Evansville (1919), St. Charles Boys Home in Milwaukee, WI (1928), Gibault School for Boys, Terra Haute, IN (1934), St. Joseph High School (formerly Central Catholic HS), South Bend, IN (1934) Monroe Central Catholic High School in Monroe, MI (1944), Gilmour Academy in Gates Mills, OH (1946), Boysville of Michigan, Clinton, MI (1948), St. Edward High School in Lakewood, OH (1949), Archbishop Hoban High School in Akron, OH (1953), Sacred Heart Military Academy in Watertown, WI (1956), Holy Cross High School in River Grove, IL, (1964), and Bishop David High School in Louisville, KY (1965).

Slide 3 Schools, of course, were not the only apostolic outreach of the Province. Dujarié Press, located in the Columba Hall south annex generated hundreds of titles over the years under the direction of Brother Ernest Ryan. The books were mostly about the lives of the saints and were written to appeal to Catholic grade school children. Almost all were written by brothers, generally at a fast pace and following a standard format—the titles sold by the thousands year after year. Following the death of Brother Ernest in 1963, Brother Sigismund Danielski was named editor of Dujarié Press and oversaw it until its closing in 1968. Since the Notre Dame Post Office was established in the 1850s, brothers staffed it, with the last Brother retiring in 2004. For all of this time, the brothers' postal salaries were a significant support to Holy Cross. Brothers taught and were employed at the University of Notre Dame. Midwest Province Brothers

were also employed at Ave Maria Press, on community-owned farms, and at three homes for boys in Indiana, Wisconsin, and Michigan.

With the provincial administration well settled at the new building on Highway 933, it was time to implement the other plans the Province had for the large adjacent property. The 1964 chapter mandated building a "province center" on that property, and soon, plans were operational for not only a Brothers' Center residence but also an infirmary and a junior college to accommodate both postulants and scholastic brothers. Classes began at Holy Cross Junior College in the fall of 1966. Originally, the junior college was meant for brother candidates and brother scholastics only, but within a year, the campus had opened up to other lay students. Novices continued to be formed at St. Joseph Novitiate, Rolling Prairie, Indiana, until it was closed in 1967 and converted to LeMans Academy, a military boarding school formerly called Sacred Heart Military Academy located in Wisconsin.

In 1968, at the General Chapter in Rome, Brother Donatus was elected to the General Council and was named the First Assistant, the first Brother to be so named. [Slide 4](#) He was replaced as Provincial of the Midwest Province by Brother Charles Krupp, who had been Personnel Director of the Province and, before that, principal of St. Edward High School in Lakewood, Ohio. One of Brother Charles' biggest challenges was the number of men choosing to leave the Congregation, some in final vows and some in temporary vows. There was a church-wide reassessment of vocations after Vatican Council II. Moreover, religious groups in the Province were no longer assigned to new locations without consultation. These changes mandated new approaches to staffing the schools.

In 1974, the brothers officially withdrew from Cathedral High School in Indianapolis.

Most of the sixteen brothers still on the staff there elected to teach in other province schools. By 1973, Brother Charles Krupp had sensed that the loss of teaching brothers in the Province had to be addressed in the schools. His council mandated the creation of boards for each province-owned school (Holy Trinity, St. Edward, Archbishop Hoban, and Holy Cross). These boards would increasingly rely on local board members who were not brothers to shoulder the responsibilities of keeping the schools viable. In 1976, the provincial council discussed withdrawal from Archbishop Hoban High School in Akron, Ohio, but a local effort to keep the brothers, resulted in the Province's renewed faith in the school. It has remained a province commitment.

In 1972, the young brothers in formation at Holy Cross College were relocated to houses in South Bend on Blaine Street and Lincolnway West, the former for scholastic brothers and the latter for aspirants. The availability of the south wing at the Brothers' Center allowed for a priests' renewal institute to operate for several years. A large lounge area was eventually built in 1978 between André Hall and Basil Hall, thus connecting what had been the small separate college faculty house to the Brothers' Center.

Slide 5 In June of 1979, Brother Philip Armstrong became the provincial of the Midwest Province. Previously, he served at Boyssville in Michigan and as district superior in West Africa. Of primary importance for the new council was the continuing establishment of boards at the province schools, a process that took several years to develop. The presence of brothers in the province institutions continued to decline, leaving only a few in each ministry. Some members of the Province began a conscious ministry to the Hispanic population, mostly at Holy Trinity High School in Chicago. The growing need for serving this population eventually led to

individual brothers learning Spanish, and some of these brothers were given permission to join the U. S. Province in their ministries in Chile and Peru.

Slide 6 Beginning in 1985, Brother Thomas Moser served as provincial. Previously a teacher of biology and religion as well as assistant novice master and superior of the Brothers' Center, Brother Thomas would face nine years of change in the Province. The brothers moved out of two brothers' residences: Holy Trinity in Chicago and Archbishop Hoban in Akron. The number of brothers in our schools declined, and brothers' ministries continued to diverge mostly at the initiation of individual brothers who began second careers. By the end of Brother Thomas' term in 1994, the brothers remained officially involved at only six high schools, LeMans Academy and one of the boys' homes. Five were owned by the Province (Holy Trinity High School, St. Edward High School, Archbishop Hoban High School, Holy Cross High School and LeMans Academy). In 1968, the ownership of Gilmour Academy had been turned over to an independent board of an equal number of Holy Cross religious and local lay members, largely in imitation of the governance structures established at the University of Notre Dame. A few brothers remained at traditional diocesan commitments at St. Joseph High School in South Bend and Reitz Memorial High School in Evansville, and a few remained at Boyssville of Michigan. Brothers not involved in these traditional apostolates had migrated, as individuals, to other ministries in service to the greater Church.

In 1988, the South-West Province published a new guidebook for involvement in our traditional educational ministries. *Vision and Governance* was the first official attempt to raise expectations and put into writing ideas about how to maintain the Holy Cross traditions and values in our schools. This handbook began to put into words what had been merely an oral tradition, including a history of the brothers and an initial description of "the Holy Cross

Tradition," with specific references to the writings of our founder, Blessed Basil Moreau, including his book, *Christian Education*, and quotes from his circular letters to the members of his young Congregation. It also reflected on the place of the brothers' mission in the context of the mission of the Church in the United States. Lastly, the new handbook explained why Holy Cross, as a religious community, needed to do things differently – to be more intentional about our individual and corporate identity and to more fully include lay collaborators (teachers, staff, parents, board members), who it stated would "substantially determine whether or not Catholic schools realize their mission and accomplish their objectives."

Though *Vision and Governance* was promulgated by and for the South-West Province, several of the Midwest Province school leaders, with permission, started to share and implement many of the concepts presented. Brother leaders found the local educators and board members very welcoming of anything that could be done to preserve and advance the charism, mission, values, and traditions of the brothers. All knew there were fewer and fewer brothers in the schools and that if efforts were not deliberate about preserving our heritage, it could be lost. To use a colloquial phrase, our lay collaborators were "hungry" for everything that could be shared with them about how to be Holy Cross educators at Holy Cross schools. With great enthusiasm, everyone learned a new common vocabulary describing an experience believed to be important at Holy Cross schools. Ideological ownership of the charism, mission, values, and traditions switched from the brothers as primarily responsible, to a shared responsibility of the entire school community. Acknowledging that all mission is local, each school engaged in a process to identify and define the local Holy Cross core values or charisms and promote the educational philosophy, concepts, and ideas found in the founder's writings, the official documents, and the Constitutions of the Congregation of Holy Cross. Today, each school has committed to a

Memorandum of Understanding and a Sponsorship Agreement with the Brothers of Holy Cross that identify responsibilities regarding maintaining and promoting what it means to be a Catholic school in the Holy Cross tradition and to be Holy Cross educators.

To support this initiative toward a revitalization of the founder’s charism and philosophy and recognizing the changed demographics of leaders and workers in our schools, the three brothers’ provinces in the United States created structures to support sponsorship as a means of preserving and advancing the brothers’ legacy in education. Briefly put, sponsorship is a way of describing the relationship between a ministry and the religious community who had historically held primary responsibility, both canonically and civilly, for that ministry. Within the concept of sponsorship, there is an aspect of mission effectiveness – preserving Catholic identity in the context of the unique Holy Cross tradition, culture, heritage, values, etc. of the institution. It was a deliberate effort to move from an oral tradition of the brothers to an intentional, articulated language that could define our unique identity as Holy Cross educational ministries.

The enthusiastic interest of lay (non-brother) collaborators in this “movement” caused the creation of a specific structure, an office, to lead the efforts to articulate and promote the brothers’ educational legacy. Holy Cross Educational Ministries was established in 1997 as a “sponsorship office” to work primarily with the schools of the Midwest and Eastern provinces. Efforts of HCEM focused on developing resources and programs for mission effectiveness for boards, administrators, faculties, and students. There were retreats and conferences for school leaders (brothers and lay), teachers, and students. National speakers who were experts in sponsorship research helped the brothers, boards and administrators understand and develop best practices for sponsorship policies and documents as the Midwest implemented this model of co-responsibility for mission. Students and teachers gathered at St. Edward University, Austin,

Texas or the University of Notre Dame to learn about and experience deeply the meaning of the mission and culture of Holy Cross today. Through these shared experiences, the participants gained an appreciation of the deep and extensive network that continues to enliven the legacy of the brothers' educational ministry. Studying the history, mission, and charism of the Congregation, the *Constitutions*, and the writings and spirituality of Father Moreau grounded the culture of the schools in the essential core values of the traditions and philosophy of a Holy Cross education and encouraged collaboration.

In 2004, the Holy Cross Institute at St. Edward's University was established as a combined initiative of St. Edward's University and the three brothers' provinces in the United States: the Midwest, the Eastern and the South-West. The Holy Cross Institute's website states that it "exists to further the application of the Catholic and Holy Cross educational mission of participating educational institutions. Its effort involves education, formation and research: education of the public about the values and philosophy of Holy Cross education promoted from the time of Father Basil Moreau, founder of the Congregation of Holy Cross, to the present; formation of board members, administrators, faculties and staffs, students and other members of school communities in these values; and research into these values and their application in education and teaching in the present time and into the future." Besides its annual convocation, many resources have been created and are available through their website.

The interest around this movement was confirmed when schools, who once had been part of the Holy Cross family observed what was being done and asked if they could rejoin the family and once again be a part of Holy Cross. In November of 2009, Cathedral High School in Indianapolis asked to be brought back under the sponsorship of the Midwest Province. When the brothers left the school in 1974, it had become an independent Catholic school with no Holy Cross

affiliation. Under a new agreement, the school came under Midwest Province sponsorship and has thrived ever since. Likewise, in 2013, Notre Dame College Prep, Niles, Illinois which had once been a ministry of the then Indiana Province of Priests, asked the Midwest Province about joining our network of schools. The school was approved, and sponsorship began in 2014.

Today, there are six officially sponsored schools and one college in the Midwest Province: Holy Trinity High School and Notre Dame College Prep in the Archdiocese of Chicago; Gilmour Academy, St. Edward High School, and Archbishop Hoban High School in the Diocese of Cleveland; Cathedral High School in the Archdiocese of Indianapolis; and Holy Cross College in the Diocese of Fort Wayne-South Bend. The Province also sponsors Holy Cross Village, a continuum of care retirement community at Notre Dame, and the Midwest Province Holy Cross Associates.

Slide 7 A new venture began in 1994 at the request of Brother Carl Sternberg, who had been serving in ministry in Palm Desert, California. Brother Carl had started an association of people who were not brothers but wanted a close connection with the brothers, to share their spirituality, and to have a stronger prayer life within that context. At first, the Province did not officially incorporate the "Associates" into the Province, though it did offer support based on the actions of several Provincial Chapters. In 2012 Holy Cross Associates became a separate nonprofit organization under the title Midwest Holy Cross Associates.

Collaboration with other provinces has always been important. In 1969, the Province joined with the other American brothers' provinces to share a common novitiate at Valatie, New York, and in 1971 joined with all the provinces of the United States for a novitiate in Bennington, Vermont. When the Indiana Province opened their own Novitiate in 1978, the other provinces continued their combined efforts until 2004, when they joined the Indiana Province

novitiate in Cascade, Colorado. The three Brother provinces shared facilities at Dujarié Infirmary throughout its history. An inter-province outreach was also developed in the diocese of Savannah, Georgia. In 1990, several Midwest Province Brothers had already volunteered for ministry on the Caribbean island of Dominica. The Savannah and Dominica ministries lasted only as long as the first brothers stayed.

Slide 8 In the mid-1990s, Holy Cross Junior College, under the leadership of Brother Richard Gilman, officially dropped the word "Junior" from the college title. In 1994, the Province granted eight acres of property to the college for expansion. The college also took over the south wing of the Brothers Center for student housing and André Hall to use for office space. In 2017, Holy Cross College and the Midwest Province entered into an agreement to sell land and thus put both the college and the Province on firmer financial footing while addressing the priorities of the University of Notre Dame. In the end, Notre Dame purchased the college land and buildings and then agreed to lease the buildings and property back to Holy Cross College for seventy-five years. With the monies so realized, the college could pay off its debt and engage in significant internal restructuring toward a more sustainable model. At the same time, the brothers sold land to the east, south, and west of the college, which, combined with the college land, gave Notre Dame control of the remaining adjacent property to the west of the University.

Slide 9 In 1994, Brother William Geenen was elected provincial of the Province. After serving for years at Gilmour Academy, both as a teacher and Director of Admissions, Brother William relocated to Florida. During an earlier visit there, he sensed a need for services to senior citizens. During twenty years of work in the Sarasota area, Brother William's "Senior Friendship Centers" were developed so seniors could congregate for fellowship and shared services, including senior daycare. Perhaps the most significant of the services Brother William

developed were medical clinics where seniors could receive free health services from doctors who had come to Florida to retire but were relicensed to donate services at the Senior Friendship Centers in Sarasota and Senior Friendship Centers in two additional Florida cities, Fort Meyers and Venice. When Brother William became Midwest Provincial and relocated to South Bend, he studied the brothers' properties along the St. Joseph River and began the development of new housing and services for senior citizens for which the brothers would be sponsors and participants – a new ministry for the province. His vision began with an expansion of Dujarié House Infirmary and the construction of a new building for assisted living called "Schubert Villa," after the major donor. Eventually, independent living villas and apartments were added to the assisted living units and skilled care facilities to form Holy Cross Village, a continuum of care retirement community with fully licensed care programs.

When Brother William's term ended in 2000, he was replaced by his assistant, Brother Donald Gibbs. Brother Donald's term was contentious, and he eventually resigned from office effective October 25, 2002. That same year, Holy Cross College announced it was becoming a four-year institution, no longer a junior college. However, it retained its associate degree for students who wished a two-year diploma. **Slide 10** When Brother Donald resigned as provincial of the Midwest Province, his assistant, Brother Robert Fillmore, was appointed by the Superior General to lead the Province until a province-wide election could be held. In 2003, Brother Robert Fillmore was elected by the members of the Midwest Province. The Spring of 2003 marked the closing of LeMans Academy and Holy Cross High School in River Grove, IL closed in 2004.

As the numbers of Holy Cross Brothers in the United States continued to diminish, the South-West Province and the Eastern Brothers Province announced a meeting in April 2008 to

discuss the merger of the two provinces. The Southwest and the Eastern Provinces of Brothers soon announced their intended merger to become the Moreau Province. The Midwest Province chose to stand alone and not to be part of a merger at that time.

Slide 11 In 2009, Brother Chester Freel was elected provincial. Before being province vocation director, Brother Chester had spent a long career in child care, social work and administration at Boysville of Michigan. Until this time, the Midwest Province had maintained its own vocation director and formation programs, with significant collaboration with other provinces, mostly for novitiate. During Brother Chester's term, the Midwest Province and Moreau Province expanded their collaboration in vocation promotion and the formation of brothers. The 2015 Provincial Chapter formally endorsed the collaborative programs developed with the Moreau Province, which included one vocation director, a defined program for discernment, and an initial pre-novitiate formation at Holy Cross College staffed by members of both provinces. The 2018 Provincial Chapter presented a detailed description of vocation programming and formation efforts, including relevant legislation from the 2016 General Chapter. Recommendations were made to continue and expand collaboration with other provinces in the United States to contribute to the quality of the Holy Cross formation experiences. They included identifying brothers to work in formation ministry; further collaboration without duplication of vocation and formation ministry; a commitment to financial and personnel support for existing programs – which were evaluated to be healthy and wholesome for both the priest and brother candidates; and further dialogue with the Priest Society on how to appreciate each other's vocation and to work together on formation and vocation issues.

In May of 2010, the Midwest Province completed an extensive plan of renovations inside Columba Hall so that all brothers living in the building would have a private bathroom. Also, plans were implemented to allow brothers needing assisted living services to remain at Columba Hall. Living at Columba Hall was more economical and allowed for a continuation of quality of life in community while still receiving medical assistance when needed.

Slide 12 The Midwest Province faces a new provincial chapter in the summer of 2024 under the direction of its Provincial, Brother Kenneth Haders, who was elected in 2018. Brother Kenneth had been assistant provincial before his election and before that had served in school administration for many years. The sponsorship models in the Midwest Province schools have continued to develop, empowering willing lay collaborators to take ever-increasing responsibility for the Catholic and Holy Cross identity at each school. The Province sees an eventual unification with the other three provinces in North America. With combined formation programs, the three U. S. provinces are working to transition smoothly to one Province, with our Canadian religious becoming a new district by 2028. There are currently only seven Brothers under the age of 75. Age and declining numbers called into question our ability to continue as a viable independent province. The Midwest Province has enjoyed an expansive and challenging history that spanned over half a century. The Province now looks forward to its future with hope and back to its past with satisfaction.