

The Journey

continues...

a history of the Sisters of the Holy Cross



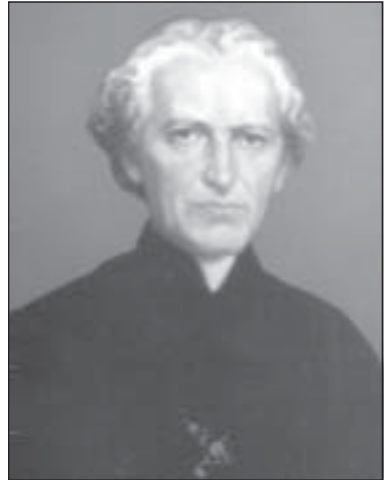
Sisters of the Holy Cross

Origins

The Sisters of the Holy Cross were founded in August 1841 in Le Mans, France. They were the third community of those religious who call themselves Holy Cross.

It all started with a priest of the diocese of Le Mans, France, Rev. Jacques Dujarie. In 1820 Father Dujarie had founded a community of brothers to teach boys in the rural areas of a France still recovering from the effects of the French Revolution. As his health deteriorated, he asked for another diocesan priest to assume the responsibility for his brothers. So it was that Rev. Basil Moreau, professor at the diocesan seminary, assumed their direction in 1835.

Earlier that same year Father Moreau had brought together a group of priests whom he called auxiliary priests. In 1837 the two groups formed the Congregation of Holy Cross, named for the surrounding area of Le Mans where Moreau had in the previous year begun a school that he named Notre Dame de Saint Croix. On August 4, 1841, a third branch, called Marianites or “little Marys,” was founded by Moreau to provide ancillary services at this school. In the second half of the 19th century the women of Holy Cross became three distinct and autonomous congregations: Marianites of Holy Cross with headquarters in France; Sisters of the Holy Cross with their general house at Saint Mary’s, Notre Dame, Indiana; and Sisters of Holy Cross with their generalate in Montreal, Canada.



**Rev. Basil Anthony Moreau,
founder of the Holy Cross
congregations**

The original purpose of the sisters began to change the very day after the first four sisters received the habit, for on August 5 one of the priests, Rev. Edward Sorin, CSC, and six Brothers of Holy Cross left Le Mans for Indiana where the bishop of Vincennes had requested brothers to educate the boys of his diocese. After some months in southern Indiana, these men moved north in November 1842 and settled on land in the northern part of the state. Here Sorin immediately made plans to establish a great American Catholic university, which he named Notre Dame du Lac for the mission founded there some years earlier by Father Stephen Badin, the first priest ordained in the United States. Almost immediately Sorin wrote for sisters and told Moreau that when they came they should also be “prepared to open schools.”

The first four sisters arrived in July 1843, three of them having made vows just before leaving Le Mans. Very soon three young women from the surrounding countryside asked to

join them, but there was no room and the bishop refused permission for a novitiate. Sorin searched for property and found it across the state line in Michigan, part of the diocese of Detroit. In the river town of Bertrand the three young women and their superior arrived in July 1844. Here on September 8, in the mission Church of St. Joseph, they received the habit of the Sisters of the Holy Cross, the first time it was given in the New World. Their Frenchness and their ministry were about to change.

The people of the town asked them to open a school for their



Father Moreau blesses sisters who were missioned from France to North America in 1843. (bas relief sculpture, Congregational Archives)



Holy Cross Hall, erected 1903, Saint Mary's College, Notre Dame, Indiana

daughters, which they did in September with the approval of Sorin. That small school, the first of many, became the well-known Saint Mary's College, Notre Dame, Indiana. The sisters also began to teach some local orphans and deaf children, and in 1845 two of them went farther north because a Holy Cross priest asked them to teach some Potawatomi children at his mission in what is presently Silver Creek, Michigan. In 1850 the sisters and brothers established a school in St. John, Indiana, to teach the children of German immigrants. This was the first non-Indian mission in Indiana outside the Notre Dame-Bertrand axis. Their original purpose had truly broadened considerably in response to the needs of the time and place. Their ancillary services continued in their own schools and at the University of Notre Dame.

The needs of a nation

An additional request for their services was made in October 1861, six months after the outbreak of the Civil War, when Governor Oliver P. Morton asked Father Sorin to send some sisters to care for his Indiana troops then serving in Kentucky. The morning after the request, six sisters under the

direction of Mother Angela (Eliza Gillespie) left for Paducah. Before the war ended, approximately 80 of the 160 Sisters of the Holy Cross in the United States would serve in the western theater of the war and for one year in a military hospital in Washington, D.C. Four of them who served on *The Red Rover*,

the first Navy hospital ship, have been recognized as the forerunners of the Navy Nurse Corps.

This wartime nursing was the beginning of the sisters' ministry in health care. At the request of the local bishop in Illinois, they returned to Cairo, Illinois, where they had nursed during the Civil War, and opened a hospital there in 1867. Other hospitals were founded in cities across the country: Salt Lake City, Utah; South Bend and Anderson, Indiana; Boise, Idaho; Jacksonville, Illinois; Columbus, Ohio; Fresno and Mission Hills, California; and Silver Spring, Maryland. In the second half



**Mother M. Angela Gillespie
(1824–1887)**

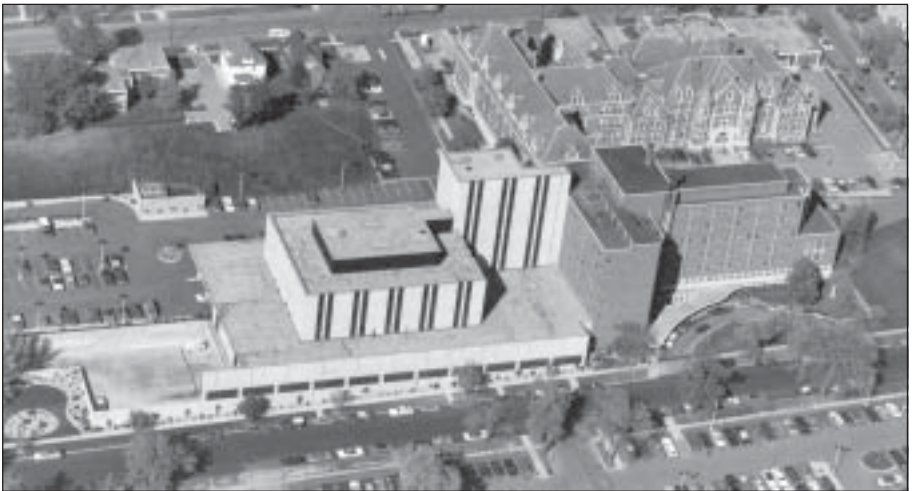
of the 20th century, four of these were either sold or closed.

Holy Cross Hospital in Salt Lake City, founded in 1901, was to be the first of many schools of nursing. By 1918 each hospital had its own school. In 1950 the four small schools in the Midwest formed a central school of nursing, which closed in 1975. Gradually the other hospitals with one exception also closed their schools. That exception was Mount Carmel Hospital in Columbus, Ohio. In 1990 Mount Carmel School of Nursing became Mount Carmel College of Nursing. It was approved by the National League for Nursing and accredited by the North Central Association in 1994. It continues to thrive today.

In 1979 the Holy Cross Health System was formed to include all hospitals with their many outreach programs sponsored by the Sisters of the Holy Cross. In 1999 it joined with Mercy Health System of Detroit to form Trinity Health System sponsored by a public juridic person, Catholic Health Ministries.

During the intervening years, the Sisters of the Holy Cross had become justly famous for the quality of their schools across the country. That school founded in 1844 in Bertrand was multiplied many times in academies of varying sizes from Woodland, California, to Baltimore, Maryland, sometimes in large cities and sometimes in farming communities. Many parochial schools were likewise staffed throughout the nation. Several orphanages were founded in the 19th century and closed in the middle of the next century when dioceses established ones for the entire diocese. In the middle years of the 20th century three colleges were founded across the country and subsequently closed.

So American had the congregation become that in 1869 the sisters in the United States, with the exception of those in



Saint Joseph's Hospital, South Bend, Indiana, founded by the Sisters of the Holy Cross in 1882



Mother M. Augusta Anderson (1830–1907), first superior general, Sisters of the Holy Cross

Louisiana, became an autonomous congregation, with their generalate at Saint Mary's, Notre Dame, Indiana, and called themselves the name by which they had thought of themselves since their arrival in America, Sisters of the Holy Cross. Mother Angela (Eliza Gillespie) became their mother superior. In 1889 their constitutions were approved by Rome and they elected Mother Augusta (Amanda Anderson) their first American superior general. Their ministry continued to be confined to hospitals, schools and orphanages as their constitutions stipulated.

The call to internationality

In 1853, responding as always to a request, this time from ecclesiastical authorities through the founder, some sisters from France and the United States joined the men of Holy Cross in undertaking a mission in Bengal, then part of India. They were called home in 1879. In 1889 10 sisters from the United States returned to the subcontinent but were recalled before the end of the decade. In 1927 four sisters from America returned to Bengal and became the first of many in that century and since who have ministered there. It is from this country that most of the young women were entering the congregation as the 21st century began.

That was the beginning of a more international ministry for the congregation. Brazil was next in 1947 when the cardinal of São Paulo asked for sisters to staff a health facility. On arrival the sisters realized the facility was yet to be built. Neither the archdiocese nor the sisters were able to build this health-care facility at that time. The sisters took the

opportunity to adjust their ministry from health care to education. Initially they opened a finishing school to financially sustain themselves and at the same time they opened a school to serve the poor. In outlying areas of that country the sisters still serve the immediate and long-term needs of the people and help empower them to take charge of their own lives.

At the invitation of Bishop Vincent McCauley, CSC, of Fort Portal, Uganda, the sisters assumed responsibility for a secondary school there (1967). Encouraged by the Brothers of Holy Cross, the sisters responded to the call for service to Ghana (1983). The South American mission was enlarged to include Peru (1982). About 20 years were spent in Israel providing ongoing formation for sisters from Asia and Africa. Then the sisters expanded their pastoral and health-care ministries to Mexico, where they continue to serve the poor in that country (1987). As young women from these countries



Sister Marian Teresa Gomes, left, first postulant from Bengal (now Bangladesh), and Sister Joseph Mary Hoess in the early 1960s



Sister Rose Martin Tragesser involves town children in an income-producing recycling project in Telémaco Borba, Brazil.

wished to enter the congregation, novitiates were established in those areas where Sisters of the Holy Cross ministered.

In the mid-20th century, the nature of the community and its mission broadened, especially after the Second Vatican Council with its emphasis on the role of the Church in the modern world. Renewal Chapters changed the structure and lifestyle of the congregation and a new constitution was written to reflect these changes. Approved in 1982, it reaffirmed in modern terms their ongoing charism: “God calls us in the Congregation of the Sisters of the Holy Cross to form an apostolic community of religious women for whom the teachings and counsels of the gospel are rule of life. We share in the mission of Jesus to reveal his Father’s love for all people, to proclaim the Good News to the poor, freedom to the oppressed and healing to the afflicted. As a congregation of pontifical right, we are available for service to the entire Church.”

No longer were they bound by specific ministries. This constitution said simply: “As a congregation whose missionary charism is to respond to the needs of the Church, we determine our types and places of service based on these needs.” Succeeding General Chapters have given greater meaning to these needs.

Responding to the signs of the times

Since their founding, the Sisters of the Holy Cross have always responded to the injustices of their times and have sought to correct or eliminate them. After the Chapter of 1984, this response to injustice was expanded by an emphasis on “systemic” change. A Congregation Justice Committee was formed to help members of the congregation understand and



Sister Mary Ann Uebbing joins in village celebrations in Fort Portal, Uganda.



Sisters rally for debt relief, Washington, D.C., 2000.

address issues systemically, and to do so from a global perspective. In 1996 a sister was assigned as full-time head of the Congregation Justice Office.

As the new millennium approached these needs intensified. In the Chapter of 1999 the sisters committed themselves anew to “pray, study, reflect and act to reinterpret religious life and the vows in such a way as to direct, empower and free us to walk the path of justice, to do what we must do to address violence, and to restore right relationships in our congregation, church and society.”

As the commitment to justice expanded, the general councils of the four congregations of Holy Cross officially launched the Holy Cross International Justice Office in November 2000. The office serves as a vehicle for creating a well-informed, proactive, public “Holy Cross voice” that impacts the critical justice issues of our time. Areas of focus for its work currently include global economic justice, ecological sustainability, rights of marginalized people, and peacemaking and nonviolence. The office also acts as a clearinghouse for

information and action opportunities for the entire Holy Cross family. Activities include publicizing educational resources, providing analyses of issues and facilitating unified action for justice—both among congregation members and with other justice-related groups.

The journey continues . . .

Thus as the new century begins, the Congregation of the Sisters of the Holy Cross endeavors, as it has always done, to discern the needs of the times and to meet them as personnel and finances allow. As ministry priorities evolve and change, the congregation updates news of its progress on the Internet for members and the general public.

In July 2004 the congregation held its 23rd General Chapter, during which the members elected new leaders and set the direction of the congregation for the next five years:

We, Sisters of the Holy Cross, open to the transforming fire of the Spirit, ardently desire and commit ourselves to the promotion of right relationships with God and in our congregation, church, world and cosmos.

The members altered the structure of the congregation in order to reflect its growing sense of themselves as an international congregation with members in four continents throughout the world.

Without doubt the Gospel of Jesus Christ is quite enough to serve as a rule of life for religious. Besides it belongs to God alone to preserve the Association of Holy Cross and to bring it to its full development just as it was he who began it. . . .

— Rev. Basil Anthony Mary Moreau, CSC

Mission Statement of the Sisters of the Holy Cross

We, Sisters of the Holy Cross
throughout the world,
are called to participate
in the prophetic mission of Jesus
to witness God's love for all creation.

Compassion moves us
to reflect on the signs of the times,
discern needs,
and respond.
We stand in solidarity
with the poor and the powerless.

Our life together
enriches and strengthens us
to foster community wherever we are.



Text written by Sister M. Campion Kuhn, CSC,
Sisters of the Holy Cross general archivist 1979–1993; and
associate archivist 1993–present

Bibliography

Costin, Sister M. Georgia, CSC, *Priceless Spirit* (Notre Dame, Ind., 1994)

Costin, Sister M. Georgia, CSC, ed., *Fruits of the Tree, Sesquicentennial Chronicles, Sisters of the Holy Cross* (Ave Maria Press, Notre Dame, Ind., 1991), three volumes

www.cscsisters.org —Sisters of the Holy Cross

www.holycrossjustice.org — Holy Cross International Justice Office

Journey



Sisters of the Holy Cross
পবিত্র ক্রুশ ভগিনীগণ
Irmãs da Santa Cruz
Hermanas de la Santa Cruz

100 LOURDES HALL-SAIN'T MARY'S
NOTRE DAME, INDIANA 46556-5014

WWW.CSCSISTERS.ORG

5.06/3K