a history of the Sisters of the Holy Cross

the journey continues...

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Origin of the Sisters of the Holy Cross

The Sisters of the Holy Cross trace their origin to the Congregation of Holy Cross, founded in the 19th century by Blessed Basil Anthony Moreau in Le Mans, France.

In 1843 Father Moreau sent four sisters to northern Indiana to assist the Holy Cross priests and brothers who were establishing a school for boys and young men. This school would later become known as the University of Notre Dame. Moreau wanted his Association of Holy Cross to be a reflection of the Holy Family, which in turn he saw as a reflection of the Holy Trinity. The brothers, called Josephites, were to be, like St. Joseph himself, an image of God the Father; the priests, called Salvatorists, were to make Christ present in the world by their eucharistic and sacramental ministrations and in their own lives; and the sisters, called Marianites, were, like Mary, to

give life in whatever form it was needed and to whomever needed it.

While first providing domestic assistance to the priests, brothers and students, the four sisters soon turned their attention to the education of young women. They began teaching the local girls just over the Michigan-Indiana state line in a river town north of South Bend and Notre Dame. By the time they celebrated their first Christmas in America, the sisters welcomed three postulants. All were American of Irish descent. On September 8, 1844, in the mission Church of St. Joseph in Bertrand, Michigan, the three novices received the Holy Cross habit, the first time it was given in the New World.

Holy Cross sisters continued to respond to the needs of settlers and Native Americans, opening schools for immigrants and deaf children, establishing orphanages and teaching the Potawatomi children in present-day Silver Creek, Michigan. Their school moved from Bertrand, Michigan, to Indiana in 1855 and grew to become Saint Mary's College, a recognized leader among Catholic women's colleges in the United States.

Le Mans Hall, Saint Mary's College, Notre Dame, Indiana

Sister Patricia Mary Crane, right, consults with students from Fe y Alegria 25 in Lima, Peru, on their choices of DVDs for their Video Forum class.

In the second half of the 19th century, the women religious of Holy Cross became three distinct and autonomous congregations: Marianites of Holy Cross (headquartered in France), Sisters of Holy Cross (Montreal, Canada), and Sisters of the Holy Cross (Notre Dame, Indiana).

The Sisters of the Holy Cross established more than 100 academies, schools and colleges—from Woodland, California, to Baltimore, Maryland. They served as principals, faculty and staff in their schools, which were known nationally for the high quality education they offered. Holy Cross sisters also staffed parochial schools across the United States and continue to teach around the globe today.

Saint Mary's College in Notre Dame, Indiana, and the Academy of the Holy Cross in Kensington, Maryland, remain under the sponsorship of the Sisters of the Holy Cross. These institutions continue to thrive well into the 21st century, educating today's young women in the long-established Holy Cross tradition of academic excellence and service.

As the nation expanded, the sisters responded by establishing 19 hospitals over 133 years, serving as administrators, nurses and chaplains.

Holy Cross Hospital, Salt Lake City, Utah, 1875

The needs of a nation spark a health care ministry

Six months after the outbreak of the U.S. Civil War in 1861, the sisters responded to the request of Governor Oliver P. Morton of Indiana who asked the congregation if it could spare sisters to care for the Indiana soldiers then serving in Kentucky. Although they had no training as nurses, six Holy Cross sisters, led by Mother M. Angela (Eliza Gillespie), volunteered to journey to Paducah, Kentucky, to tend the sick and the wounded. Many more sisters followed. Simon Cameron, President Abraham Lincoln's Secretary of War, asked them to take over the nursing at a government hospital in Louisville, Kentucky; others went to hospitals in Illinois, Tennessee, Missouri and Washington, D.C.

On Christmas Eve 1862, three Holy Cross sisters boarded the U.S. Navy's first hospital ship, the *Red Rover,* to serve as nurses for the wounded on both sides of the war. They traveled the Mississippi River carrying sick and wounded soldiers to various military hospitals. In so doing they became what U.S. naval history today hails as the forerunners of the United States Navy Nurse Corps. Before the

conflict ended, 65 of the 160 Sisters of the Holy Cross in the United States would serve in the Civil War, and another 13 sisters would serve in the Spanish-American War.

In the decades that followed, Holy Cross sisters continued to respond to the unmet health needs of people across the developing frontier. In fact, so American had the congregation become that in 1869 the sisters in the United States, with the exception of those in Louisiana, became an autonomous congregation and called themselves the name by which they had thought of themselves since their arrival in America, Sisters of the Holy Cross. Mother Angela became their mother superior. In 1889 their constitution was approved by Rome and they elected Mother M. Augusta (Amanda Anderson) their first American superior general.

As the nation expanded, the sisters responded by establishing 19 hospitals over 133 years, serving as administrators, nurses and chaplains. In 1979 the congregation brought together its remaining eight congregation-sponsored hospitals to form Holy Cross Health System. In 2000 this health system consolidated resources with Mercy Health Services to create Trinity Health. Sponsored by Catholic Health Ministries, Trinity Health is one of the largest Catholic health care systems in the United States.

Today, Holy Cross sisters continue to minister in a variety of health care settings worldwide.

Sister Maura Brannick takes a blood pressure reading in South Bend, Indiana.

Sister Mary De Nardis in Uganda

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.

Sister Shagorica Maria Gomes, administrator, with students from the boarding school in Bangladesh

The call to internationality

In the 19th century, Holy Cross sisters followed their founder's injunction to go where the need is and made the journey to Bengal (then part of India, now the country of Bangladesh). Holy Cross sisters from the United States went to Bengal briefly in 1853 and again in 1889, but were recalled before the end of the decade. In 1927 Sisters of the Holy Cross returned and established a permanent mission in Bengal. In 1950 they founded Holy Cross College and Holy Cross Girls High School in Dhaka, two of the most highly rated schools in Bangladesh. Holy Cross sisters continue to minister in Asia today, both in India and Bangladesh.

The sisters' efforts in Asia began a more international ministry for the congregation. When asked in 1947 by the cardinal of São Paulo to staff a health facility, Holy Cross sisters responded and traveled to Brazil. Upon arrival the sisters realized the facility did not

yet exist. However, they took the opportunity to refocus their ministry from health care to education, establishing Colégio Santa Maria, one of the highest rated schools in São Paulo. In 1982 Holy Cross sisters expanded their ministry in South America to Peru, filling parish and community needs wherever they went.

Holy Cross sisters, at the invitation of the bishop of Fort Portal, Uganda, began their ministry in Africa in 1967. In 1983 the sisters responded to the call for service in Ghana. In North America, the sisters extended their pastoral and health care ministries to Mexico in 1987. They continue to offer basic and higher education and other services to the people of these countries.

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. No longer were the sisters bound by specific ministries. Their new constitution, approved in 1982, 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."

The Sisters of the Holy Cross, acutely conscious of the urgent needs of the world, today serve as educators, nurses, administrators, counselors, social workers, parish and campus ministers, retreat leaders, writers, attorneys, and advocates for social justice and systemic reform. They minister around the globe—in eight countries on four continents, an international congregation with a growing international membership.

Sister Verónica A. Farjardo, center, with her students in Ghana

Sisters of the Holy Cross have responded to the injustices of the times and have always stood in solidarity with God's suffering people.

Sister Martina Dery with a friend in Ghana

Responding to the signs of the times

From their earliest days in 1843 up to the present, the Sisters of the Holy Cross have responded to the injustices of the times and have always stood in solidarity with God's suffering people.

After the sisters' 1984 General Chapter, this response to injustice was expanded. The social service response was complemented with a systemic response and, in 1991, a Congregation Justice Committee was formed to help members of the congregation understand and address issues systemically and from a global perspective. A full-time congregation justice coordinator joined the staff in 1996 to facilitate the congregation's work for justice.

As the commitment to justice broadened, the sisters dedicated themselves in their 1999 General Chapter to reinterpret religious life in such a way as to direct and empower them to walk the path of justice, to address violence, and to restore right relationships in their congregation, church and society.

Sister Michael Mary Nolan assists indigenous communities in Brazil gain legal title to their lands.

The general councils of the four congregations of Holy Cross officially launched the Holy Cross International Justice Office in 2000. This office serves as a vehicle for creating a well-informed, proactive and public "Holy Cross voice" that impacts the critical justice issues of our time. Areas of focus for its work 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, which includes priests, brothers, sisters and associates. Activities include publicizing educational resources, providing analyses of issues, and facilitating unified action for justice among congregation members and with other justice-related groups.

The congregation shares issues of concern and updates news of its progress on its website, www.cscsisters.org, and the Holy Cross International Justice Office's website, www.holycrossjustice.org.

Sister Thais Nascimento Bitencourt does play-therapy with a man with disabilities in South Bend, Indiana.

The journey continues ...

The Congregation of the Sisters of the Holy Cross endeavors, as it always has done, to discern the needs of the time and to respond as personnel and finances allow. As ministry priorities evolve and change, the congregation, through its international and diverse membership, brings health, education and advocacy services to assist and empower people around the globe.

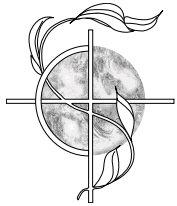
Sister Patricia Anne Clossey, who serves in pastoral ministry and social work, visits with a child in Guadalupe, Nuevo León, Mexico.

During the 2009 General Chapter, the members elected new leadership and called the congregation into a journey of communion for the next five years:

We, Sisters of the Holy Cross, for whom
the Gospel is rule of life,
are acutely conscious of the urgent needs of the world.
Impelled and empowered by the Spirit,
we pledge to respond to these challenges
and we commit ourselves to
transformation, right relationships,
ecological sustainability and systemic change
for the life of the world.

The sisters invite everyone to join them in their mission: young women discerning religious vocations, benefactors to support their ministries with the poor, and laypersons to participate as associates or serve as employees. For more information, visit the congregation's website at www.cscsisters.org.

Sister Joyce Rozario holds a young child as she teaches at the Women's Sewing Center in Jalchatra, Bangladesh.



Core Values

Compassion compels us to stand with and embrace others in their suffering, that together we may experience God's liberating and healing presence.

Faith impels us to trust God ever more radically and to risk responding as disciples of Jesus.

Prayer, personal and communal, grounds us in God's unconditional love, calls us to integrity in discernment, and animates us in our work of building a society of justice and love.

Community commits us to seek ways to journey together which energize and sustain us to live our mission in solidarity with one another.

Mission

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.

We are grateful for Sister M. Campion Kuhn, CSC, the congregation's general archivist (1979–1993) and associate archivist (1993–2009), who assisted in the creation of this publication.

The following published works also provided valuable information:

Costin, Sister M. Georgia, CSC. *Priceless Spirit: A History of the Sisters of the Holy Cross, 1841–1893*. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1994.

Fruits of the Tree: Sesquicentennial Chronicles, Sisters of the Holy Cross. Notre Dame: Ave Maria Press, Volume I (1988), Volume II (1989), Volume III (1991).

Sisters Shibanlin Nongsiej, Joysline Mary Lyngkhoi, Rose Mary Marngar and Molly Jacob carry a sack of potatoes in Jatah, India, as they minister with the people in the village.

Sisters of the Holy Cross

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