

Midwest Holy Cross Associates

Brief History of the

Congregation of Holy Cross

In the troubled period following the French Revolution, Basil Anthony Moreau, a priest of the diocese of Le Mans, founded the Congregation of Holy Cross.

To supply certain needs of the devastated church throughout the countryside, he planned to organize some clerics as Auxiliary Priests. By August 1835 he had recruited priests for this purpose. They were but few in number and they assisted the diocesan clergy by preaching parish missions. He intended also that they would be educators and that some should be prepared for that work.

Only days after this group was first assembled, at the request of his bishop, Father Moreau accepted responsibility for the Brothers of Saint Joseph, who had been founded fifteen years earlier by another priest of the same diocese, James Francis Dujarie, pastor of Ruille-sur-Loir. They were zealous laymen who had been meeting the need for elementary education in villages in the region. What led to an unusual venture in the history of the church was Father Moreau's decision to unite these two groups, which he and Father Dujarie did by the Fundamental Act on March 1, 1837. Priests and brothers were united within a single association to minister to the pastoral and educational needs of the French church.

Events moved still further and began to display a pattern and a purpose that emerged as a distinctive proposal. In 1838 Father Moreau gave a rule of life to a small band of laywomen. He would later direct them also to the work of education. At Sainte-Croix (Holy Cross), a suburb of Le Mans, he gradually formed the three groups into a single religious congregation composed of three autonomous societies. Each had its own authority structure, but all were united under a single general administration. He introduced the practice of making vows first among the brothers, then among the priests and sisters.

The priests, brothers and sisters became known respectively as the Salvatorists, Josephites, and Marianites of Holy Cross. Their founder wished them to be united in their lives and in their work as a "visible imitation of the Holy Family."

From the outset Father Moreau saw in this family of Holy Cross an apostolic religious community at the service of the church well beyond the frontiers of his own country. During the first fifteen years, when the group was still small and organizing step by step, its fields of ministry spread beyond France to other countries in Europe, to Africa and North America. It was the decision to accept the difficult mission of Eastern Bengal, then in India, that persuaded the Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith to award Father Moreau's community approval as a religious institute.

Father Moreau organized an association of lay people under the patronage of St. Joseph, whose purpose was the sanctification of its members through pious and charitable works. They were also charged with helping to fund and give spiritual support to the community's missionary efforts and were present at departure ceremonies.

The sisters became a separate community at the Vatican's stipulation for approval. Later they split into three communities which include: the Marianites of Holy Cross with headquarters in New Orleans, the Sisters of the Holy Cross with headquarters at Notre Dame and the Sisters of Holy Cross with headquarters in Canada.

Holy Cross Associates became its own non-profit organization under the Title: Midwest Holy Cross Associates in 2012. This new organization is presently under the sponsorship of the Midwest Province of Brothers.

Holy Cross has endured. And in an age when God calls forth service in many new ways, the congregation may well hope that its own distinctive way of serving – priests, brothers, sisters and lay associates in the family of Holy Cross – is "...like a mighty tree...shooting forth new limbs and branches...nourished by the same life-giving energy". This "patently imprudent" scheme is, as Father Moreau believed all along, "the work of God."

Excerpted from "Constitutions of the Congregation of Holy Cross", Historical Note, pages 7 – 13.