

Starting a New MHCA Chapter

At a Holy Cross Sponsored School

A Step-by-Step Process

The Vatican II document *Lumen Gentium* (Light of the Nations) declared in paragraph 31 that the laity is called to exercise a very active role in the Church's mission. The lay men and women of Holy Cross Associates have heard and have answered God's call to give witness to the Gospel.

We Holy Cross Associates, sponsored by the Midwest Province of Brothers, are lay men and women answering God's call to embrace the heritage and charisms of the Congregation of Holy Cross.

We witness with zeal and hope through our annual commitment to grow spiritually, form community, and serve God's people.

We develop collaborative relationships, creating a family spirit of love and inclusiveness, sharing with the Congregation of Holy Cross, the Church and the world.

If you are feeling called or want to explore further, the following will help you form a group of Holy Cross Associates in your area.



Holy Cross Associates
with zeal and hope to bring

Holy Cross: A Mighty Tree

Holy Cross will grow like a mighty tree, and constantly shoot forth new limbs and new branches, which will be nourished by the same life-giving energy.

Bl. Basil Moreau, June 15, 1854

NOTE: Items described here can be found in more detail in our resource binder.

The Vatican II document *Lumen Gentium* (Light of the Nations) declared “The laity, by their very vocation, seek the Kingdom of God by engaging in temporal affairs and by ordering them according to the plan of God...They live in the ordinary circumstances of family and social life...In this way they may make Christ known to others, especially by the testimony of a life resplendent in faith, hope and charity (nos 31)”. The laity is therefore called to exercise a very active role in the Church's mission. The lay men and women of Holy Cross Associates have heard and answer God's call to give witness to the Gospel.

A Holy Cross Associate is one who feels that call to live according to the ideals, spirit, and charisms of the Congregation of Holy Cross. Associates strive to be what exactly they are, namely people of God, called to do what they can to be witnesses of Christ by word and example to those around them. The associate's call is to live the Mission of the Church to bring Christ to all people, through the lens that is Holy Cross. They are called to embrace the heritage and charisms of Holy Cross and commit to live them out everyday, in their work, ministry, and life.

If you feel called or want to explore further, then forming a group of Holy Cross Associates in your area would be the next step.

Step One - Contact regional MHCA board Member

Contact a member of the MHCA board. They can provide you with the necessary information and other resource materials that will explain what it means to be a Holy Cross Associate, our mission, expectations of the chapter and members, and how to start a chapter or join an existing community.

Current MCHA Board member contacts for new Associates / Chapters are:

- Ignacio Martinez, imartinez@holycrossassociates.org, (925)-989-9162
- Jessica Plaspohl, jplaspohl@holycrossassociates.org, (330) 467-8522
- Br. Carl Sternberg, slmcs@juno.com, (760) 610-9373

A first step in the process is to initiate an assessment of the dynamics in the target audience. This might include exploring the following questions:

- Who might have the most influence in promoting and supporting this undertaking?
- Who might have the necessary spiritual gifts and character to attract potential participants?
- Who might have the staying power to overcome the initial challenges in starting this venture?
- Who are the most likely to be receptive to the call to association?

These questions can be answered via informal conversations or formal meetings with the potential candidates. Always remember that an organization such as a school or parish has a personality of its own. Ultimately, our purpose is to help them meet their needs in developing the spiritual growth of their community; not to compete or interfere with their own programs and initiatives.

Step Two - Contact School Administration

The next step is to contact the Principal, President or Mission Integration specialist at the school and arrange a meeting. If they are not familiar with MHCA, be sure to bring resources and information with you so they can understand the organization. Ask if they would be open to forming a chapter. You would be asking faculty, staff, parents, and alumni so the Administration would be able to make suggestions as to the best avenues for seeking out potential Associates.

Here are some suggestions when talking to specific individuals in the school community:

- To someone in charge of the school's mission as a sponsored Holy Cross ministry: share your conviction that starting a chapter of the HC Associates would be an excellent way of deepening a genuine connection to the Holy Cross mission and spirituality
- To the school administration: even though it is an individual calling, we would want to begin by inviting teachers, staff and parents to consider becoming HC Associates as a way of deepening the school's commitment to the family of Holy Cross
- To the leaders in charge of campus ministry and responsible for the development of the spiritual life and Christian service of the students: you can ensure that the commitment to your task becomes genuine when you let God work through you giving witness to what you are asking the students to be and do. The development of your own spirituality as you grow in Christ was so important to Fr. Moreau. It is beneficial to have a support group in which you can share your own joys and struggles as part of your spiritual growth. This witness will inspire your students to also walk the walk
- To potential participants: it is important to identify those members of the school community whom you think might be ready to receive this message and would respond in a receptive manner to an invitation to explore their calling

Establish a contact person within the school to act as a conduit for questions and materials. Make sure that the Administration is kept fully informed throughout the process. It is essential that the Administration share the conviction that starting a chapter of the Holy Cross Associates would be an excellent way of deepening a genuine connection to the Holy Cross mission and spirituality. This support and promotion is invaluable to the success of your chapter.

Step Three - Invitation

You will then invite targeted individuals to a short, informational session that covers the basics of what is MHCA, provide materials that can assist them in discerning this opportunity, and also give an invitation to a **"Come and See"** Session (see step 4). The presentation should be short, but inviting and encouraging. There should also be time set aside for attendees to ask questions or gather more materials. Ideally, there will also be time for socializing and "Holy Cross" hospitality.

You are encouraged to show our video, entitled **"Holy Cross Associates – Seeking God, Community, Service"** (item # "1.1.4. DVD: Holy Cross Associates – Seeking God, Community, Service", (March 2014), in the resource binder; about 6 minutes)

You could ask for time at:

- 1) Faculty or department Meetings
- 2) Alumni Association Meetings
- 3) Parent Club Meetings
- 4) Sports Booster Association Meetings

Even though it is an individual calling, the best way to begin is by inviting several teachers, staff and parents to consider becoming Holy Cross Associates as a way of deepening their personal commitment to the family of Holy Cross. Please be sure to include all branches and groups of adults that are involved in and support your school, and try to avoid focusing solely on teachers and their development. Holy Cross Schools have planted seeds of goodness in so many people for generations, many who probably already live the life of an Associate (but just don't know it)! The diversity in our members reflects the diversity that is the Tree of Holy Cross.

The invitations can be personal to one-on-one meetings, to group gatherings, voluntary get-togethers in the context of a party in which those invited are aware that this topic will be presented, or included as a presentation at a regular meeting of faculty and parents.

Step Four - Come and See Meetings

It is recommended that you have at least two **"Come and See"** meetings

1. Deeper Introduction – At this meeting, those who said they were interested in learning more about the Associates will have the opportunity to do just that. There are several presentations that can be given to show what associates are and what they do. Contact your regional board member for more information on these, or consult the Resource Binder. Ask those attending why they have come and what their expectations are for their ongoing participation. This sharing of their expectations and desires will begin to model the value of their forming community as Associates.
2. Chapter Gathering – Those that continue to show interest in discerning their calling to be an Associate, should participate in at least one, and preferably 2 or 3 regular chapter gatherings. These gatherings should involve *Lectio Divina*, including Scripture and Holy Cross reflections. Again, your MCHA board-member contact can help you prepare this; they can also explore the possibility that a current MHCA member might be (geographically) available to facilitate and conduct the initial chapter gatherings. Make sure to include in these sessions the time for sharing and reflecting on the process and what the attendees think about the MCHA opportunity.
3. Those who wish to move forward should agree on a date and time for future gatherings. It is important to have a fixed time and date for monthly gatherings. For example, we will meet on the first Tuesday of the month at 4:00 PM in the school board room. If the time is consistent, participants can clear their calendars for future meetings.

As always, be sure these gatherings are filled with **Holy Cross Hospitality** - food, fellowship, faith, and fun!

(See the Binder for an outline of a typical agenda for chapter gatherings).

Step Five - Formation

Those who have discerned that they would like to move forward with this process must undergo Initial Formation. This should take place after “Come and See” Meetings.

The goal of the Initial Formation process is for the candidate to acquire the requisite knowledge and understanding of the Holy Cross Constitutions and how they are applied to the life of an Associate as well as an appreciation for the History and Spirituality of the Congregation of Holy Cross. However, it is recognized that those who are seeking to become an Associate may come from different backgrounds and experiences that may have led them to have different degrees of understanding and appreciation for this foundational information.

Accordingly, based on the familiarity and background of each new candidate, there are two suggested approaches for completing the Initial Formation of an aspiring Associate, leading to their final discernment and first yearly commitment. These approaches are detailed in item # “4.2. Guidelines for Formation Process of new candidates”. Please refer to this document for more details on these approaches. They are briefly described here as follows:

Part 1 - Interview and Inquiry

During this step, a current member will interview the new candidate to discuss their interests and background (item # “4.1. Interview & Follow-up for New Candidates”).

Part 2 - Information/Formation

A - Candidate with sufficient background and familiarity with Holy Cross

If a candidate has prior knowledge, experience and study of Holy Cross, they can benefit from an abbreviated formation process. The process is contained in the document item # “4.2.1. Come Follow Me” in the resource binder.

B - Candidate not familiar with Holy Cross and requiring extended formation

If a candidate presents themselves as a “clean slate” in regards to knowledge, experience and study of Holy Cross, then they must participate in a more intensive formation process. The process is based on the use of the booklet, item # “6.5.1. Pilgrimage to Holy Cross” and related documentation, accessible in the resource binder.

Implementation of the Formation Process (Part 2)

There is great flexibility when working with individuals who seek to become Associates. Please consider the scheduling needs of the current chapter members or formation leader / facilitator, as well as those of the candidate(s). The formation processes above can thus be completed via any one of the following methods and schedules.

Retreat - The entire study of the Constitutions can be done during a retreat, making the formation process brief, but intense.

Weekly or Monthly Meetings - These meetings could be one-on-one, but preferably best in small groups (to enhance sharing and community building, including hospitality) depending on the number of candidates.

Part 3 - Discernment and Commitment

This is a time for the candidate to discern if the Holy Spirit is calling them to make a commitment to be an Associate.

The candidate should be led through the use of item # “4.3. A Journey Discerning Commitment” to facilitate this process.

July 10, 2014