

Midwest Holy Cross Associates

Typical Chapter Gathering

Meeting Frequency, Structure and Content

Most chapters meet once a month for spiritual formation, breaking bread together, and hospitality.

Each month, the chapter will meet to discuss and pray about a different theme or topic. A facilitator will select the topic and prepare materials for the group. Some examples of themes or topics are the Charisms or Mission of Holy Cross, Living the Christian Life, the Liturgical year, or any aspect of our Catholic Faith. Some groups select a theme for the year, and pick monthly topics relevant to that overall theme. Several booklets pertaining to themes related to the Congregation of Holy Cross are available and included in section 6.2 of the Resource Binder. These are an excellent source of material for the content of the monthly gatherings. However, many other topics can be chosen by the facilitator or chapter Associates to suit their particular need.

The role of facilitator for the monthly gatherings should be rotated among all of the Associates. The materials should incorporate some form of the Lectio Divina Process with reading, re-reading and sharing / discussion. The readings should always include Sacred Scriptures, or sometimes feature the writings and reflections of Bl. Basil Moreau, other members of our Holy Cross Family, or other Catholic writers and teachers. This enables the Associates to make connections between the word of God, MHCA, and their daily life.

Spiritual Growth using Lectio Divina Process

"I would like in particular to recall and recommend the ancient tradition of Lectio Divina: the diligent reading of Sacred Scripture accompanied by prayer brings about that intimate dialogue in which the person reading hears God who is speaking, and in praying, responds to him with trusting openness of heart (cf. Dei Verbum- n.25) If it is effectively promoted, this practice will bring to the Church - I am convinced of it - a new spiritual springtime."

- Pope Benedict XVI, September 2005

Lectio Divina, which literally means "divine reading," is the ancient practice of praying the scriptures. Lectio Divina is not intended to increase our intellectual knowledge of the Bible, though it can have that effect; instead, it is intended to draw us closer to God and transform our attitudes and behavior. The process helps us to enter into a conversation with God, so that we may know what He is calling us to do.

"We pray with the church, we pray in community and we pray in solitude. Prayer is our faith attending to the Lord, and in that faith we meet Him individually, yet we also stand in the company of others who know God as their Father." no. 23 Holy Cross Constitutions

While there is no set method of Lectio Divina, we can learn from those who have a long tradition of reading the Bible in this way. The usual method of Lectio Divina includes moments of reading (lectio), reflecting on (meditatio), responding to (oratio) and resting in (contemplatio) the Word of God, as explained below:

1. Reading, or lectio - Slowly read the passage and look for details, verbs, nouns, and words, anything that jumps out at you. What does this passage say? Write down or underline the words or passages that speak to you.
2. Reflecting on, or meditatio - Slowly read the passage again, but take some time to really chew, to gnaw upon the words. The word "meditate" in hebrew is *hagah* and it is the same word used in Isaiah 31:4, "*As a lion or its young growling (hagah) over the prey.*" This is not a time to empty your mind, but to fill it with the passage. Here you engage your mind, using the reason to let the words sink in. What words continue to catch and hold your attention? This step of Lectio Divina is like a quest, where we go deep into the Word and begin to allow it to transform us. Write down what you discover.
3. Responding to, or oratio - Start to pay attention to the connections to which your meditation has led you. What is God trying to teach you about your life and how he needs you to respond to him? Talk to God about this, communicate with Him and respond.
4. Resting in, or contemplatio - Rest in God's peace and take away the fruit of the process - what God has given you today!

At the end, ask - "What is God asking me to do? How can I put this into practice?"

Here are some helpful tips for getting the most out of this practice:

1. Be sure to have 2-3 minutes of silence after reading and re-reading before sharing and discussing aloud. Don't be afraid of this silence - God is speaking to you! Also, recognize that not everyone will want to share after each step. Try to avoid just "speaking in a circle" and allow the Spirit to work and give you the words.
2. Suggestions for the text - You could pick the Mass readings of the Day, or look for passages that relate to a particular theme that you are exploring. You could also pick a passage that relates to the writings and reflections of Bl. Moreau, and incorporate these readings into the process. They can be simple or complex, but ensure that your group can give the proper time to each meditation. Booklets with relevant themes / topics are available in section 6.2 of the Resource Binder.
3. Rituals and Settings - Consider placing an icon or statue or crucifix in a central place for focus, or decorating the environment to set the tone. Music and song can also be helpful to promote and encourage reflection.

Forming Community (Hospitality and “breaking bread together”)

“Our calling is to serve the Lord Jesus in mission not as independent individuals but in a brotherhood. Our community life refreshes the faith that makes our work a ministry and not just an employment; it fortifies us by the example and encouragement of our confreres; and it protects us from being overwhelmed or discouraged by our work... Open and generous and hospitable love is to characterize our houses and our service”. - nos. 33, 51 Holy Cross Constitutions

Holy Cross Associates develop a family spirit through community. We sustain community by religious, ministerial and social support activities such as sharing hospitality, hopes, sorrows, joys and social gatherings celebrating Holy Cross feast days and events. It becomes clear that friendship and love for one another mark our Christian commitment.

Hospitality and Fellowship go hand-in-hand with the ministry work and formation of Holy Cross Associates. As we build each other up spiritually, we connect to each other as a family of love and support. And what better way to do this than by following the example of Christ and sharing a meal together. Chapters will always include a meal in their monthly gatherings. This allows for an informal, yet essential family environment that is an integral part of who we are as Holy Cross.

Typical Agenda for Monthly Chapter Gatherings

Time Allotted (minutes)	<u>Description</u>
30	Hospitality; social, “catching up”
5	Opening Prayer to Holy Spirit
40	Lectio Divina (discerning) – topics: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Constitutions - Holy Scriptures - Charisms - MHCA booklets - Facilitator’s choice
30	Sharing / Discussions
10	Chapter Business <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Select next facilitator - Topic, time, place - Service projects - Old / new business
5	Closing Prayer / Reflection
As needed	Hospitality / pot luck meal

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