**Holy Cross Mission Appeal**

**July 24-25, 2021**

**St. Bavo Parish**

**Rev. Peter J. Pacini, C.S.C.**

The Congregation of Holy Cross was established in 1837 in the town of Sainte Croix (Holy Cross), just outside of Le Mans, France. This new religious community resulted from a merger of the Brothers of St. Joseph, founded by the then ailing Fr. Jacques Dujarie, and a group of auxiliary priests of the Le Mans Diocese, led by Fr. Basile Moreau. Their original mission was to help the people of Le Mans and the surrounding area to recover from the devastation of the French Revolution. The priests traveled around, preaching what we today call “parish missions,” and the brothers worked to rebuild the decimated school system.

Within two years of forming this community, Fr. Moreau was already starting to receive requests for help from various bishops in other parts of the world. The first foreign mission for Holy Cross was an unsuccessful attempt in Algeria, beginning in 1839. The next attempt, only two years later, proved far more successful.

In 1841, Fr. Edward Sorin (at age 27) and six brothers (two of whom were just teenagers) crossed the Atlantic at the invitation of the Bishop of Vincennes, in southern Indiana. They expected to open and staff primary schools in that Diocese. But, Holy Cross’ mission in the New World greatly expanded once they were given a patch of swampland in northern Indiana, where they established a university dedicated to “Our Lady of the Lake” (Notre Dame du Lac). With Notre Dame as their centerpiece, Holy Cross grew rapidly, founding numerous parishes, schools and orphanages in this area, and later expanding from coast to coast.

In 1847, just ten years after the founding of the Congregation, 14 Holy Cross religious were sent to Canada to expand the Catholic schools system in the Diocese of Montreal. Although Holy Cross at one time had hundreds of priests and brothers in Canada, and numerous institutions, our numbers have greatly diminished in recent years. Soon our only institution in Canada may be the famous Oratory of St. Joseph in Montreal, founded by Holy Cross Brother, Saint André Bessette.

In 1851, at the invitation of the Vatican’s Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith, Holy Cross accepted responsibility for a mission to the East Bengal region of India – what is now the independent country of Bangladesh. In this land, where other religious communities had failed to establish a Christian presence, Holy Cross succeeded. In fact, most of the Catholic Bishops in Bangladesh today are Holy Cross religious. And, in this country where Christians make up only a fraction of one percent of the population, some of the finest schools are run by Holy Cross. Our presence in Bangladesh and India is growing rapidly, especially in the more rural tribal areas, where the needs are greatest. We staff numerous parishes and have established schools from the elementary to the university level. Our vocations in Bangladesh and India are flourishing to such an extent that we are now sending out missionaries from those areas to serve in other parts of the world, including at the Oratory of St. Joseph, in Montreal.

In 1857, twenty years after its creation in France, and with active missions already firmly established on opposite sides of the world, the Congregation of Holy Cross finally received official approbation from the Holy See as an apostolic religious community.

As the Congregation grew, its missionary work eventually reached many other parts of the world. For example, Holy Cross religious from French Canada established a presence in Haiti in 1944. We now serve in 8 of the country’s 10 dioceses, and two of the Haitian bishops are Holy Cross. We operate numerous schools there, one of which had to be completely rebuilt after the massive earthquake in 2010. One of our schools is a teacher’s training institute, operated in collaboration with Notre Dame’s Alliance for Catholic Education. So, we are not only educating the population, but also training other teachers, to shore up the Catholic school system in Haiti. In a country known for extreme poverty and political chaos, Holy Cross remains a pillar of stability for the local Church and a sign of hope for a long-suffering population.

Holy Cross also ventured into Latin America in the 1940’s. In 1943, brothers from Canada went to Brazil, and priests from the United States went to Chile. Twenty years later, in 1963, priests and brothers together went to Peru. In recent years, we also took over a very large parish in Monterrey, Mexico. Our numbers have always remained small in these countries, but our impact has been much larger. We serve some of the poorest of the poor, in parishes and other institutions, and we provide quality education at a wide range of schools.

Holy Cross missionaries from the United States began serving in Africa in 1957. It began with three brothers, who went to Ghana, in West Africa. The following year, a group of priests went to Uganda, in East Africa. One of them, Fr. Vincent McCauley, became the first Bishop of the Diocese of Fort Portal. The Ugandan mission later expanded into neighboring Kenya and Tanzania. As in other places, Holy Cross in Africa has established numerous schools, at all educational levels. Our people serve in rural areas and in huge urban slums. They also run medical dispensaries in desperately poor areas, where people otherwise would have no access to health care. And, as in Asia and Haiti, vocations are flourishing. For several years now, we have celebrated more priestly ordinations and final vows of brothers in Africa than in all of the Western Hemisphere combined.

Everywhere the Congregation of Holy Cross has gone, our missionary efforts have focused on education, evangelization, and service to the poor. We build schools, establish parishes, and try to meet all the basic needs of the people. Our efforts to serve the local Church and attract vocations in the developing world have been extremely successful. However, *money* has always been a limiting factor, with much of the financial support coming from the United States and Canada. Our Holy Cross Mission Center continues to raise funds for a wide array of projects in Asia, Africa, the Caribbean, and Latin America. We need the generous support of our benefactors here as our institutions in these other parts of the world continue to grow and establish a firm foundation for the future. Your help today will be greatly appreciated, and it *will* make a difference. On behalf of all of my brothers in the Congregation of Holy Cross, I would like to thank you *personally* for your support of our mission.