



Discernment Group
Curriculum

Year III:
The
Congregation
of Holy Cross

Brothers in Holy Cross,

Thank you for being willing to lead a vocational discernment group. While a call to priesthood and religious life in Holy Cross only comes from God, that call is usually nurtured in the context of a relationship. A young man is able to clarify that call and respond to it when they get to know Holy Cross religious, as well as other young men discerning a call to Holy Cross. Therefore, your work in building relationships with them, and helping them get to know one another, is critical to our vocational efforts. The hope of the Office of Vocations is that this resource makes your work a little easier.

How to Use This Resource

This guide is in the form of a 3-year curriculum, with 12 meetings for each year. The first year covers Religious Life, the second year covers Priesthood, and the third year covers Holy Cross. This should allow you some flexibility in case the same young men attend your group for consecutive years. By the same token, you will notice some repetition from year to year, to ensure that certain key topics will be covered for everyone.

This guide can be as flexible as you want it to be. If you don't have much time to prepare for your meetings, you can simply use the meeting outlines verbatim, allowing you to put your time where it is spent best: inviting men to the group, and engaging them once they are there. If you want to modify the content in the outlines, or even add or eliminate meetings, that is fine, too. We understand that you know these young men well enough to know what kind of gatherings will benefit them the most. Hopefully this guide makes it a little easier to get started.

Objectives of Vocation Groups

The goals of vocation groups in a parish or campus are to:

- Promote vocations and create greater visibility for Holy Cross in its institutions
- Create an entry point to which we may invite men whom we think might be interested in discerning
- Provide a consistent point of contact for us with men who are already discerning
- Allow discerning men to come into regular contact with other discerning men
- Pave the way for more formalized, one-on-one contact with men who may be interested in investigating the seminary

The Office of Vocations will work with you to make sure our efforts complement each other. We'll refer young men in your area to your group, and you'll refer them to us when it seems they are ready for more formal contact with us.



Starting a Group

Inviting young men to participate in a vocation group is the most important, and often most intimidating, part of launching and maintaining a group. While parish bulletins and Mass announcements are important, there is no substitute for personal invitations. We encourage you to call young men whom you think might benefit from this group and extend the invitation personally. (If you are working with minors, you should call their parent or guardian before you contact the minor, and keep them in the loop throughout the process.) If you are able to establish a core group of young men who attend consistently, you might seek their assistance in identifying and inviting new men to join. Don't be afraid to cast the net wide. The worst that can happen is that people tell you "no," but you never know who might need a little nudge in order to finally take steps towards exploring their vocation.

Suggested General Structure of Meetings

As stated earlier, the outline that we've attached is flexible and can be adapted however you think best meets the needs of your group. The outlines that we've written contain the following elements, and they are written under the assumption that each meeting will last about an hour.

- **Theme of the Day:** A brief summary of the topic for the day; useful for advertising or communicating with the participants in advance.
- **Reference:** Each of the sessions is based on some outside reading, primarily "Vita Consecrata for Religious Life; Pastores dabo vobis for Priesthood"; and "The Constitutions of the Congregation of Holy Cross for Holy Cross." Group facilitators are encouraged to read through these readings ahead of time, although you can certainly facilitate the meeting without them if you wish. You can also make these available to participants ahead of time (as all readings are available online) if you think they would wish to prepare before the meeting. Again, the outlines are designed so that advanced preparation is not required.
- **Prayer:** It is recommended that each meeting begin with a substantial experience of prayer. The Liturgy of the Hours is strongly encouraged.
- **Reading:** Each meeting then begins with a passage from Scripture. You may wish to allow them to have some time to pray with this passage as they begin the meeting, or you might even make this passage available ahead of time for their personal prayer.
- **Reflection on the Theme for the Day:** This brief talk will be given by the group facilitator. The idea is not to make the meeting into a classroom-style lecture, but these reflections should provide the background material necessary to make discussions more fruitful. This reflection can be read by either the facilitator or the participants, or the facilitator could use it as a springboard for his own thoughts on the theme of the day.
- **Personal Witness:** While the background information above is important, participants are usually hungry for an idea of what these topics actually look like when put into practice. The Personal Witness is designed to put a human face on the theme of the day. It is also a great opportunity to bring a guest speaker into the meeting, perhaps a pastor or visiting seminarian.
- **Group Discussion:** Group discussion is probably the most vital part of the meeting, as it gives participants a chance to offer their thoughts and



ask their questions, and it also gives the facilitator a chance to see how engaged the participants are. Considerable time (25–30 minutes) should be left for group discussion.

- Takeaways: Suggestions have been offered to allow participants to reflect on the theme for the week(s) after the meeting so that additional fruit may result.
- Closing: The facilitator will be responsible for closing the meeting and setting the next meeting time.

If there are any additional ways that the Office of Vocations can support you to make these meetings more fruitful, please let us know. In the meantime, know of our gratitude for your vocation and for your willingness to invite others to consider sharing our life in Holy Cross.

Fraternally,

Rev. James T. Gallagher, C.S.C.



Year III

The Congregation of Holy Cross

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Theme for the Day:

Everyone has a call from God, but recognizing it requires that we learn how to listen to the voice of God calling us quietly.

Begin with Prayer...

Reading: 1 Kings 19:11–13a

Then the Lord said: Go out and stand on the mountain before the Lord; the Lord will pass by. There was a strong and violent wind rending the mountains and crushing rocks before the Lord—but the Lord was not in the wind; after the wind, an earthquake—but the Lord was not in the earthquake; after the earthquake, fire—but the Lord was not in the fire; after the fire, a light silent sound. When he heard this, Elijah hid his face in his cloak and went out and stood at the entrance of the cave.

Reflection on the Theme of the Day:

We often think of a call from God as a loud, dramatic event. For most of us, though, it comes in the form of a whisper, much like it did for the prophet Elijah. This passage from 1 Kings gives us a good idea of how God often calls people to follow Him. In order to hear His call, we have to learn to listen, so that we might separate the voice of God from all of the other noise that exists in our everyday lives. That's why vocational discernment isn't just about making one big decision. Instead, discernment is part of our relationship with the Lord. Therefore, prayer—not simply prayer for guidance in our discernment, but deepening our relationship with Christ—is an indispensable part of recognizing God's call. If we learn to listen to God each day, we will eventually come to understand where He is calling us.


Vocational discernment isn't just something that someone does if they sense that God is calling them to be a priest, brother or sister. It's a part of every Christian life. Every Christian has a vocation, because our vocation is the specific way that God is calling us to live out our baptismal call. Constitution 1 of the Constitutions of the Congregation of Holy Cross says, "We were already His, for we bore the name of Christians. We had already been initiated into His church. We had been washed in baptism and confirmed in our belief and given the eucharistic nourishment in memory of Him. But there seemed to come a

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Session One:

What Is God's Call?

*Reference: Constitution 1: God's Call
(paragraphs 1-4)*



time when the Lord was calling us to take some further step.” So discernment isn’t about deciding whether or not to give our lives over to Christ. We all must do that anyway. So the first step in discerning a call to priesthood is prayer, learning to recognize what it sounds like when that tiny whispering sound comes. This process is different for everyone, and so hearing other people’s vocation stories is a good way to learn what this process may look like.

Personal Witness

This witness talk should focus on your own vocation story, specifically the early stages in which you began to sense the first stirrings of a call to priesthood and religious sense. (The next conference will focus more on the steps that you took to respond to that call.)

- When did you first recognize the stirrings of a call to priesthood and religious life?
- What did that call feel like? What emotions did it stir within you?
- What was your prayer life (and relationship with the Lord) like at this time? How did you learn to listen to God? How were you already following him in your life?
- How could you tell that this call was coming from God and not from somewhere else?
- Were there any external signs that confirmed your interior sense of call?
- What advice would you give to a young man who is at this early stage of trying to identify God’s call for his life?

For Group Discussion

- Think of a time in your life when you feel like you’ve recognized and followed God’s call in your life, even for a small decision. What did it feel like?
- What Scripture passage have you found to be the most helpful in your vocational discernment? Why?
- How can you tell if a stirring in your heart is really part of a call from God, or whether it comes from somewhere else?
- How can prayer help you recognize God’s call?
- When do you feel most that God might be calling you to priesthood and/or religious life?
- When do you feel most uncertain about what God’s call for you might be? How do you deal with these feelings of uncertainty?
- What is the best advice you’ve ever received about vocational discernment?



Takeaways

Reread 1 Kgs 19:11–13a, and make some time to spend 20–30 minutes in silence with God this week (in front of the Blessed Sacrament, if possible). Think of one way that you can incorporate more silence into your weekly routine.

Closing...



Theme for the Day:

Once a person recognizes God's call, they have to respond. This is a process that demands a great deal of faith and humility.

Begin with Prayer...

Reading: Gospel of Luke 5: 1-8

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Two:

Responding to God's Call

While the crowd was pressing in on Jesus and listening to the word of God, he was standing by the Lake of Gennesaret. He saw two boats there alongside the lake; the fishermen had disembarked and were washing their nets. Getting into one of the boats, the one belonging to Simon, he asked him to put out a short distance from the shore. Then he sat down and taught the crowds from the boat. After he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, "Put out into deep water and lower your nets for a catch." Simon said in reply, "Master, we have worked hard all night and have caught nothing, but at your command I will lower the nets." When they had done this, they caught a great number of fish and their nets were tearing. They signaled to their partners in the other boat to come to help them. They came and filled both boats so that they were in danger of sinking. When Simon Peter saw this, he fell at the knees of Jesus and said, "Depart from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man." For astonishment at the catch of fish they had made seized him and all those with him, and likewise James and John, the sons of Zebedee, who were partners of Simon. Jesus said to Simon, "Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching men." When they brought their boats to the shore, they left everything and followed him.

Reflection on the Theme of the Day:

In our previous session, we focused on learning how to recognize God's call, especially in the midst of our noisy and busy lives. But recognizing God's call is only half the battle. God does not force us to follow Him, so we must choose to respond to His call, which is not always as easy as it sounds. In the Old and New Testaments, God calls many people; the initiative for discipleship comes from God, not from us. All we have to do is respond. So many of the people whom God calls in Scripture, though – Moses, Gideon, Isaiah, Jeremiah and Jonah, to name a few – hesitated or resisted. In the passage we just read from the Gospel of St. Luke, Peter tries to resist God's call because of his own unworthiness; but Jesus calls him



anyway, even though He knows all of Peter's shortcomings. God never waits for us to be perfect before He calls us. It is the act of responding to His call that leads us on the road to perfection, just as it did for St. Peter.

Even once we become fairly convinced of God's call for us, there are many things that can keep us from responding to it: fear of the unknown; doubts that we can live the call successfully; knowledge of our sinfulness and inadequacy; desire to hold onto worldly possessions and ambitions; and many others. Constitution 1 from the Constitutions of the Congregation of Holy Cross states, "We wished to abandon all to follow Christ. We learned in time that we still had it within ourselves to hold back. We wish to be wholehearted yet we are hesitant. Still, like the first disciples we know that He will draw us along and reinforce our loyalties if we yield to Him." If we want to follow Jesus, we will have to confront any of the fears that cause us to hold back.

Personal Witness

This witness should focus on how you began to respond to God's call after you began to believe that God might indeed be calling to your life in Holy Cross, including steps you took to test and confirm this call, as well as any fears or anxieties that you had to deal with in order to respond wholeheartedly.

- When did you reach the stage of discernment in which you were fairly certain that God was calling you to take a further step by entering a formation program?
- What fears did you encounter, either in your discernment or later in your formation? What things held you back from responding to this call?
- How did you deal with these fears? What resources (prayer, spiritual direction, peers, etc.) work through these fears?
- Have there been moments of fear or hesitancy later in your religious life, perhaps in accepting a new assignment? How have you worked through these feelings?
- What examples have you seen in Holy Cross of men who have responded to God's call, either in difficult circumstances or in a way that particularly inspired you?
- What advice do you give to young men who are struggling in their discernment?

For Group Discussion

- Why do you think Biblical figures such as Moses, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Peter are so hesitant to respond to God's call?
- Think of a time in your life when you feel like you've recognized and followed God's call in your life, even for a



small decision. What did it feel like?

- What Scripture passage have you found to be the most helpful in your vocational discernment? Why?
- How can you tell if a stirring in your heart is really part of a call from God, or whether it comes from somewhere else?
- How can prayer help you recognize God's call?
- When do you feel most that God might be calling you to priesthood and/or religious life?
- When do you feel most uncertain about what God's call for me might be? How do I deal with these feelings of uncertainty?
- What is the best advice you have ever received about vocational discernment?

Takeaways

Spend some time this week meditating on your favorite call story in the Bible. Pay special attention to any obstacles that people have to overcome before they can respond. How does this apply to your own life?

Closing...

Theme for the Day:

As apostolic religious, Holy Cross priests and brothers are engaged in a variety of ministries. In each of these ministries, the work is really Christ's, not ours, and so each ministerial encounter we have is ultimately an opportunity to draw people closer to Christ.

Begin with Prayer...

Reading: Gospel of Luke 10: 1-6

The Lord appointed seventy (-two) others whom he sent ahead of him in pairs to every town and place he intended to visit. He said to them, "The harvest is abundant but the laborers are few; so ask the master of the harvest to send out laborers for his harvest. Go on your way; behold, I am sending you like lambs among wolves. Carry no money bag, no sack, no sandals; and greet no one along the way. Into whatever house you enter, first say, 'Peace to this household.' If a peaceful person lives there, your peace will rest on him; but if not, it will return to you."

Reflection on the Theme of the Day:

Most people who are attracted to apostolic religious life are attracted to the mission: spreading the Gospel through our words and actions. The Church today certainly needs all the hands she can get, because there is much work to be done. There are many people who are suffering physically, and many more who are empty spiritually. As our culture grows increasingly secular, the Church must be a prophetic voice. This may seem to be a daunting task, but following Christ has never been easy. Christ Himself acknowledges this when He sends His disciples out on mission in the Scripture passage that we just read. Jesus sends His disciples out "like lambs among wolves." Just like these disciples, we will experience some rejection for proclaiming the Gospel. Just like these disciples – who took no money bag, sack, or sandals – the Church will never feel like she has enough time, resources, people, or intelligence to carry out the mission Jesus entrusted to her. But just like these early disciples, we will also witness incredible things, and we will see people's lives transformed through powerful encounters with Christ, encounters that we will be able to help facilitate. Ultimately our inadequacies and limitations are living proof that the good work we do is God's, not ours.

As apostolic religious, we in Holy Cross like to work.
Constitution 2 of the Constitutions of the Congregation

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Session Three:

Following in the Footsteps of Christ

*Constitution 2 Mission, paragraphs
9-20*



of Holy Cross states, "For many of us in Holy Cross, mission expresses itself in the education of youth in schools, colleges and universities. For others, our mission as educators takes place in parishes and other ministries. Wherever we work we assist others not only to recognize and develop their own gifts but also to discover the deepest longing in their lives... Our mission is the Lord's and so is the strength for it. We turn to Him in prayer that He will clasp us more firmly to Himself and use our hands and wits to do the work that only He can do. Then our work itself becomes a prayer: a service that speaks to the Lord who works through us." We do many different kinds of work in these apostolates – sacramental work, teaching, administration, direct service to the poor – but the mission is always the same: the salvation of souls. When our founder, Bl. Basil Moreau, spoke about being zealous for our work, he described zeal as "that burning desire to make God known, loved and served, and thus to save souls." Thus, every task that we performed serves the greater purpose of guiding people to an encounter with Christ. When we look at some of the amazing work that has been done by Holy Cross religious, it should not fill us with pride. Instead, it should fill us with awe at the power of God working through us, and drive us to fervent prayer that God might choose to continue this work through us.

Personal Witness

This talk should focus on the ministerial work you have done as a Holy Cross religious, so as to give the participants an idea of what a life of ministry looks like in Holy Cross.

- What are some of the ministries you have done as a Holy Cross religious? Walk us through the apostolates you have had in the Congregation.
- Are there ministries that you were apprehensive about, but which turned out to be great experiences? Illustrate with some examples.
- What have been some of the high points in your ministry? Provide some stories of powerful encounters in ministry that were only possible because you were a Holy Cross priest or brother.
- How have you handled transitions to new ministries? Describe how your brothers in Holy Cross have supported you and made your ministry more fruitful and life-giving.
- What do you look forward to in the future?



For Group Discussion

- What are some of the formal ways in which a priest or brother may be of service to the Church? What about some of the less formal ways in which he can be a powerful instrument of Christ in the course of his daily actions?
- Have you ever experienced (or witnessed) a particularly powerful encounter in ministry with a priest or religious? What made this incident so meaningful, and what does it tell you about priestly/religious ministry?
- Have you ever been in a situation of ministry or service where you felt unprepared? How did you handle it? How could you see the hand of God at work in that situation?
- What types of ministry attract you in the future?
- Considering the state of our world and the secular culture, why do you think the world needs priests and brothers?

Takeaways

Talk to a priest or brother whom you respect and admire. Ask them what their “typical” week is like, and pay attention to any powerful encounters that most people would never see, especially if they only know the priest by seeing him at Sunday Mass.

Closing...

Theme for the Day:

Prayer is an indispensable part of discernment. The first step in recognizing God's call is developing a deep prayer life.

Begin with Prayer...

Reading: Gospel of Mark 5: 15-16

The report about him spread all the more, and great crowds assembled to listen to him and to be cured of their ailments, but he would withdraw to deserted places to pray.

Reflection on the Theme of the Day:

Prayer is obviously essential for any Christian, but since religious vows are supposed to help us imitate the life of Christ, prayer is especially crucial for a religious. It is only when we have a deep relationship with the Lord – nurtured every day through prayer – that we can live the vows well. As Constitution 3 of the Constitutions of the Congregation of Holy Cross says, "Our thoughts are not easily God's thoughts, nor our wills His will. But as we listen to Him and converse with Him, our minds will be given to understand Him and His designs. The more we come through prayer to relish what is right, the better we shall work in our mission for the realization of the kingdom."

The Gospels consistently report that Jesus made time to be alone to pray, as He does in the passage we just read. Much like us, Jesus was often interrupted during prayer, but He never wavered in this discipline. Likewise, we need to make sure to carve out time every day for prayer. This can be challenging, since life in an apostolic congregation is usually quite busy, but we must make prayer a priority.

When many people first try to develop a regular prayer life, they often become discouraged because they are not sure what to do when they sit down to pray. Many good and faithful people have simply never been taught how to develop a prayer life. Therefore, most Catholics could benefit from instruction in basic methods of prayer:

- Devotions: Many devotions exist in the Church, such as the Rosary, Stations of the Cross, novenas and praying with the saints. Devotions are often a series of set prayers recited

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Four:

Praying to Understand God's Will



- regularly, and their aim is to lead us closer to Christ.
- Scripture: There are several ways to pray with Scripture. One such method is called *lectio divina*. This is a method of slow, prayerful reading of a short Scripture passage, pausing on any words or images that capture your attention and allowing them to lead you into contemplation.
 - Spiritual reading: There is a wealth of spiritual literature in the Church, ranging from centuries-old classics to contemporary literature. Such literature may offer powerful insights to those who read it prayerfully.
 - Meditation: Quiet time spent alone with God is essential for any Christian. Some use a mantra or centering prayer to try to enter into contemplation. Others use this time as an occasion for free-form conversation with the Lord.
 - Examen: The Examen is a structured means of reflecting on the events of the day. The Examen is intended to help you recognize the ways that God was present in your day, and to use this awareness as a means of ongoing conversion and spiritual growth.

One way to expand your own prayer life is to talk to people whose faith you admire and learn how they pray. The more you do this, the more you will build up your own personal “toolkit” of prayer methods that will help you nurture a deep relationship with the Lord.

Personal Witness

This talk should focus on your prayer life, giving the participants an idea of what a consistent, well-balanced prayer life looks like for a professed religious in a busy life of full-time ministry.

- How did you first learn to pray? How did you pray as a child?
- As you grew older, how did your prayer life grow and change? Did you have any resources that helped you develop your prayer life?
- How did your personal prayer life change when you entered religious formation?
- What does your prayer life look like now? What forms of prayer do you use regularly? Are there any other forms of prayer that you use occasionally?
- Are there other elements to your prayer routine, such as set times, places, etc.? How did you arrive at a prayer routine that you found to be life-giving and sustainable?
- How are you able to prioritize prayer in the midst of your many ministerial obligations and other time commitments?
- What challenges do you experience in maintaining a strong personal prayer life? How do you deal with these challenges?



For Group Discussion

- Why do you think Jesus prayed?
- How do you pray? What forms of prayer do you know, and why do you enjoy particular forms of prayer?
- Does your life seem any different when your prayer life is really disciplined than it does when you have let it slip a bit?
- Have you ever received spiritual direction, or advice about your prayer life? What is the best advice you have ever received about becoming a man of prayer?
- How do you deal with periods of dryness in prayer?
- Why do you think that a disciplined prayer life would be especially important for a religious?

Takeaways

Examine your current habits of prayer. If you do not currently pray every day, schedule time for prayer every day over the next week. If you currently pray every day, think of one small thing that you can add to your prayer routine over the next week.

Closing...

Theme for the Day:

In addition to a strong personal prayer life, Holy Cross religious also make a commitment to common prayer. It is this strong prayer life that ensures that our work and our common life are centered on the Lord.

Begin with Prayer...

Reading: Gospel of John 15: 7-9

If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask for whatever you want and it will be done for you. By this is my Father glorified, that you bear much fruit and become my disciples. As the Father loves me, so I also love you. Remain in my love.

Reflection on the Theme of the Day:

In addition to maintaining a disciplined personal prayer life, religious also pray in common regularly. In doing so, we try to imitate the Apostles, who lived a life in community centered on Christ. Just as Jesus says in the Gospel passage we just read, our work only bears fruit if we remain in Him and His words remain in us. Good works are never a substitute for prayer. As Constitution 3 of the Constitutions of the Congregation of Holy Cross states, "We find prayer no less a struggle than did the first disciples, who wearied of their watch. Even our ministry can offer itself as a convincing excuse to be neglectful, since our exertions for the kingdom tempt us to imagine that our work may supply for our prayer. But without prayer we drift, and our work is no longer for Him. To serve Him honestly we must pray always and not give up." Our Constitutions call us to meet certain expectations in our prayer lives:

- Daily Mass: We are expected to participate in Mass each day unless prevented by a serious reason.
- The Liturgy of the Hours: This is the universal prayer of the Church. It is not really part of our personal prayer, although we certainly can derive great spiritual fruits from it. Rather, we pray it on behalf of the universal Church, and every priest and religious worldwide commits to pray all five hours. In Holy Cross, we are expected to pray Morning Prayer and Evening Prayer in common, and the rest of the hours in private.
- Personal Prayer: In our previous session, we covered several prayer methods that you can use in your personal prayer life. In addition to daily Mass and the Liturgy of the Hours,

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Five:

Praying to Sanctify Our Life and Work



our Constitutions call us to thirty minutes of personal prayer each day.

- Personal Retreat: Our Constitutions call us to an eight-day personal retreat each year. This is often a directed retreat.
- Community Feast Days: We are expected to make every effort to observe special feast days with community celebrations. Some of our most important feasts include:
 - Our Lady of Sorrows (September 15), patroness of the Congregation
 - The Sacred Heart of Jesus (the Friday after Corpus Christi), patron of the Priests of Holy Cross
 - St. Joseph (March 19), patron of the Brothers of Holy Cross
 - St. Andre Bessette (January 6), the first canonized saint in the Congregation
 - Bl. Basil Moreau (January 20), the founder of the Congregation
 - Final Profession/Diaconate Ordination
 - Presbyteral Ordination
 - Community funerals

Personal Witness

This talk should describe how you live out the prayer expectations set forth in our Constitutions, and how this structure of prayer has affected other areas of your life. This should give participants an idea of how, in addition to their personal prayer life, a common prayer life can be invaluable in strengthening your relationship with God and centering your work on Him.

- Describe the role that daily Mass has in your life and your priesthood/religious life.
 - When did you first start attending Mass more frequently than on Sundays alone? What prompted you to do this? How did this practice affect your faith and work?
 - How does the practice of daily Mass sustain and strengthen you in your life as a Holy Cross religious?
- Describe your experience of the Liturgy of the Hours.
 - When were you introduced to this form of prayer?
 - What have been some of your experiences praying in this manner during the course of your religious life?
 - What do you enjoy about the Liturgy of the Hours? What fruits have you derived from this form of prayer?



- Describe the role that personal retreats play in your spiritual life.
 - Where do you take a retreat? What do you do during your retreat?
 - What benefits do you derive from your retreat?
 - How does this time away impact the rest of your year, especially in your apostolic work?
- Describe your experience of community feast days and celebrations. Have there been any times when these celebrations were particularly important to you? How have they strengthened your ties with the Congregation?

For Group Discussion

- What do you see as the difference between Christian ministry and other good works, such as social work? What turns a good deed into an act of Christian ministry?
- Describe any experience you have had with the following forms of prayer. Include how you felt about this experience, any fruits of such prayer in your life, and any challenges you experienced.
 - Mass during the week
 - Liturgy of the Hours
 - Personal retreat, particularly silent and/or directed retreats
- Do you feel any desire for common prayer or faith sharing to be a greater part of your practice of your faith? Why or why not? What are the challenges in incorporating this type of prayer into your routine?

Takeaways

Pray Morning Prayer and Evening Prayer each day for the next week. Ask a friend or family member to join you if possible.

Closing...

Theme for the Day:

Community life should make us holier. Our community life should provide a witness of love and unity to a world filled with divisions.

Begin with Prayer...

Reading: 1 James 4: 19 – 21

We love because he first loved us. If anyone says, "I love God," but hates his brother, he is a liar; for whoever does not love a brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen. This is the commandment we have from him: whoever loves God must also love his brother.

Reflection on the Theme of the Day:

Jesus always lived and worked as part of a community. He was born into the Holy Family and was obedient to Mary and Joseph. He instituted the first apostolic Christian community by calling Apostles to follow Him. After His death, Acts of the Apostles records that Christians lived in communities dedicated to prayer and service. Community life has been central to the way that most Christians live their faith day to day. As the passage we just read from the 1st Letter of St. James affirms, living in community is an essential part of how we worship God. We love the God we cannot see by loving the brothers and sisters we can see.

For married people, their family is their primary Christian community. Consecrated religious have their religious order or congregation as their primary community. Our community life is essential to our identity and to our ministry. As stated in Constitution 4 of the Constitutions of the Congregation of Holy Cross, "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."

In Holy Cross, community can take place in a few different contexts. Some religious, such as those serving in university ministry, live in larger communities. Religious may live in the dorms but will gather at a central location for daily common prayer and meals. Other religious, such as those serving in

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Six:

Community as a Witness of Holiness

*Constitution 4: Brotherhood,
paragraphs 33-38*



parishes, may live in smaller communities of just a few men. These religious will also set a community schedule of common prayer and meals.

Regardless of the size or structure of the community, community life is supposed to help us be better Christians and better religious. Being with a community of people who take their faith seriously should help us grow in our faith. Living with our brothers in community also gives us a daily opportunity to practice patience and charity, as we strive to love the God we cannot see by loving the God we can see. Therefore, our community life itself is part of our mission, our way of demonstrating to the world that it is possible for different people with different temperaments to live together in harmony and to work through their differences peacefully.

Personal Witness

This talk should focus on community life as you've experienced it in Holy Cross. In particular, it should help participants understand how community life has helped you become a better Christian, and how it has helped you develop qualities that have made you a happier, holier and more well-balanced man.

- Describe some of the different community settings in which you've ministered.
- Why did you choose to enter into a religious community instead of pursuing a less community-centered option, such as diocesan priesthood?
- How do the relationships developed within community differ from an exclusive relationship, such as marriage? How can a religious meet his needs for intimacy and generativity in the absence of this exclusive relationship?
- Give an example of someone you have lived with in community who has inspired you to become a better religious in concrete ways.
- Give an example of someone who was difficult to live with, and how you grew from that experience.
- In general, how has community made you a better man and a better Christian? Illustrate with examples from your community experiences.

For Group Discussion

- What makes a community Christ-centered? What's the difference between a male religious house and a frat house?
- What different communities are you a part of? What benefits do these communities give you? What do you have to do in order to get the most from them?
- Sometimes we speak of a man as being "good in



community.” What do you think this means? What qualities does a man need to live well with others?

- How could community life help a man grow in holiness? How could they help a man live poverty, chastity and obedience more fruitfully?
- How would you compare the fruits of an exclusive relationship (i.e., marriage) with the fruits of a more communal/fraternal relationship? How would a celibate meet his needs for intimacy in community (whether local community or a wider community)?
- How have your community relationships (for example, with family) helped you grow in Christian virtue? Do you have relationships in place right now that challenge you to grow in virtue?

Takeaways

Think of one relationship in your life that brings out the best in you, and another that brings out the worst in you. Examine the difference between these relationships, and identify ways that you can grow in virtue by living each of these relationships more intentionally.

Closing...

Theme for the Day:

Community life does not only aid our personal growth in holiness. As apostolic religious, our common life should strengthen us in our mission.

Begin with Prayer...

Reading: Acts of the Apostles 4:32–35

The community of believers was of one heart and mind, and no one claimed that any of his possessions was his own, but they had everything in common. With great power the apostles bore witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great favor was accorded them all. There was no needy person among them, for those who owned property or houses would sell them, bring the proceeds of the sale, and put them at the feet of the apostles, and they were distributed to each according to need.

Reflection on the Theme of the Day:

In addition to helping us grow in faith, our brothers should help us deal with the demands of full-time ministry. As we see in this reading from the Acts of the Apostles, Christians have always sought the support of a Christian community to help them follow Jesus more closely, and this type of community helped their works to be much more effective than anything they could have accomplished as individuals. Our community should supply us with the material and spiritual necessities that will help us thrive in our ministry.

In Holy Cross, the community provides us with all of the material goods we require. All of our income goes into the common purse, and the common purse then provides us with everything that we need to live. We thus learn to depend on the community to sustain us. Our brothers should also be a blessing that recharges us after a long day of work, strengthening us to serve joyfully in our mission. As Constitution 4 of the Constitutions of the Congregation of Holy Cross states, "We are men who work. We are, as well, men who need to be revitalized after that work. Each local community needs to provide some measure of domestic privacy where we can be at home among ourselves and find an enclosure of silence for prayer, recreation, study and rest." This demands that we not only do the bare minimum to participate in community, but that we be present to our brothers so that

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Session Seven:

Community in Service of the Mission

*Constitution 4: Brotherhood,
paragraphs 39–42*



we are available for mutual support.

In Holy Cross, we almost always perform ministry as part of a Holy Cross community. Ministering alongside our brothers is a powerful witness to the importance of community life to our charism. Therefore, the witness of our common life becomes part of our ministry. Constitution 4 goes on to say, "It is essential to our mission that we strive to abide so attentively together that people will observe: 'See how they love one another.' We will then be a sign in an alienated world: men who have, for love of their Lord, become closest neighbors, trustworthy friends, brothers." Community life isn't easy, since we are all imperfect human beings, but if we put effort into living it well, it can bear fruit for the Kingdom.


Personal Witness

This talk should focus on some of the ways that the community has aided you in your apostolic work, as well as some of the work that you have needed to do in order to contribute to a vibrant community life. Whereas the previous talk on community dealt more with how community has helped you grow in personal holiness, this talk should help participants understand how community life can make them more effective in the apostolate.

- What kind of adjustment was required for you to learn to depend on the community for your material needs?
- How have you learned to depend on the support of your brothers to meet other needs, such as your needs for intimacy and friendship?
- What does it mean to you to perform ministry alongside your brothers in Holy Cross? How do you think this would compare to performing ministry apart from Holy Cross?
- How do you handle brothers who get on your nerves? How do you nurture positive community relationships with Holy Cross religious who live far away?
- What skills or personal characteristics are required for a man to be a good community member? In what ways did community life push you to grow in Christian virtue?

For Group Discussion

- Men who enter a religious community are forced to depend on the community for all of their basic needs. What aspects of this adjustment would be appealing or liberating to you? What parts of this adjustment do you think you might resist?
- According to the stereotype, men in our culture have difficulty expressing their feelings, as well as their needs for intimacy. Do you believe this to be true? Why or why not?

- 
- Who do you currently turn to when you encounter difficulties or questions in your spiritual life? In your interpersonal relationships? In your work? How did you establish these relationships, and how do you use them to keep yourself healthy and grounded?
 - In a parish or educational setting, how do you think community life could help religious minister more effectively?
 - Why are you attracted to the idea of a religious brotherhood? How do you expect that such a brotherhood might benefit you?

Take aways

Make a list of your 5 closest relationships. Identify 1 or 2 specific things that you receive from each relationship that make it life-giving for you. Based on this, you will have a better understanding of the kind of relationships you need to have in place in order to be your best self.

Closing...

Theme for the Day:

Religious vows are a way of explicitly imitating the life of Christ so that we might grow closer to Him and minister in His Name. Each of the vows requires some sacrifice, but fidelity to the vows frees a religious from worldly concerns so that they might give themselves completely to Christ.

Begin with Prayer...

Reading: Gospel of Matthew 6: 25–33

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Session Eight:

Participating in Christ's Mission through Religious Vows

Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat (or drink), or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds in the sky; they do not sow or reap, they gather nothing into barns, yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are not you more important than they? Can any of you by worrying add a single moment to your life-span? Why are you anxious about clothes? Learn from the way the wild flowers grow. They do not work or spin. But I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was clothed like one of them. If God so clothes the grass of the field, which grows today and is thrown into the oven tomorrow, will he not much more provide for you, O you of little faith? So do not worry and say, 'What are we to eat?' or 'What are we to drink?' or 'What are we to wear?' All these things the pagans seek. Your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. But seek first the kingdom (of God) and his righteousness, and all these things will be given you besides.

Reflection on the Theme of the Day:

Male and female religious try to imitate the life of Christ by professing vows of poverty, chastity and obedience. By forgoing some of the goods and pleasures of this world, they profess their trust that God will provide them with all they truly need. The secular culture sees the vows as difficult, thankless sacrifices, but this is an incomplete view of them. While they do require sacrifice, they are supposed to be liberating, not oppressive. As you can see in the passage from the Gospel of Matthew we just read, poverty, chastity and obedience should set us free so that no earthly concerns can distract us from following the Lord joyfully.

- Poverty requires us to sacrifice the ownership of material goods, relying instead on the community to provide us with what we need. It should free us from enslavement to possessions, and from the "rat race" that dominates so many



people's lives.

- Chastity requires us to sacrifice the goods of marriage and family, as well as exclusive or physical relationships. It should free us to love all people unconditionally and disinterestedly.
- Obedience requires us to sacrifice our own will, trusting that God's will (as mediated through our superiors) will lead us to our greatest happiness. It should free us from worrying about the future so that we can be completely present to our current assignment.

Each religious order or congregation has its own distinct way of living the vows. In Holy Cross, for instance, poverty does not entail material destitution. Instead it means that we contribute all we have to the common purse, and we take all that we need from the same common purse. This provides us with everything we need for ministry, while holding us accountable to one another for living simply. Chastity requires us to avoid relationships that are physical and/or exclusive, instead seeking to meet our needs for intimacy and relationship within the community. Obedience means that our legitimate superior is responsible for placing us where the community and the Church need us the most. Assignments are made in dialogue, but the religious ultimately assents to the authority of the Provincial.

Constitution 5 of the Constitutions of the Congregation of Holy Cross emphasizes that we should live our vows joyfully, not as if they are a burden. "They are an act of love for the God who first loved us. By our vows we are committed to single-hearted intimacy with God, to trusting dependence upon God and to willing surrender to God. We wish thus to live in the image of Jesus, who was sent in love to announce God's rule and who beckons to us to follow him." They further state, "We pronounce our vows in a moment, but living them for the sake of the kingdom is the work of a lifetime." While we are held externally accountable for living the letter of the vows, each religious must remain vigilant interiorly in order to live the spirit of the vows. We can never be complacent about our poverty, chastity and obedience if we want them to bear fruit for the Kingdom.

Personal Witness

The participants will already have some degree of understanding of what the vows require, but this witness talk should give them an idea of what a lived experience of the vows look like so that they can begin to picture their own life as a vowed religious.

- What attracted you to religious vows in Holy Cross?
- Before you entered formation, which of the vows did you



think was going to be the most challenging? How did your perspective change after you began living the vows?

- How has poverty forced you to grow, and what fruits and joys have you experienced as a result of vowed poverty?
- How has chastity forced you to grow, and what fruits and joys have you experienced as a result of vowed chastity?
- How has obedience forced you to grow, and what fruits and joys have you experienced as a result of vowed obedience?
- What habits or practices would you recommend to a man considering the vowed life?

For Group Discussion

- When you tell friends and family that you are thinking about religious vows, what comments have you received about poverty? Chastity? Obedience? Do you think people's perception of these vows is generally positive or generally negative?
- How do you perceive that a joyful living of vowed poverty could be a beneficial witness to our secular culture? Chastity? Obedience?
- How do you think each of the vows might challenge you to grow? Is there anything about these vows that you would look forward to?
- How do you currently hold yourself accountable for the right attitude toward material possessions? To chastity, appropriate to your state in life? To obedience to the Church and to legitimate authority? What virtues do you need in order to cultivate healthy attitudes toward each of these?

Takeaways

Take a look at the following formula, which Holy Cross religious state when professing temporary or perpetual vows. Read it out loud if you like. What feelings does this stir within you?

I (name)
stand in the presence of Jesus Christ,
the Son of God and my Lord,
in the assembly of his church,
amid the Congregation of Holy Cross
and before you, (name and office of
the person receiving vows)
to profess my dedication and my vows.
I believe that I have been called
by the Father and led by the Spirit
to offer my life and my life's work
in the service of the Lord
for the needs of the church and the world.



Therefore I make to God forever/for ... year(s)
the vows of chastity, poverty and obedience,
according to the constitutions
of the Congregation of Holy Cross.

May the God who allows and invites me
to make this commitment
strengthen and protect me to be faithful to it.

Closing...

Theme for the Day:

Men preparing for a life as a Holy Cross religious go through a structured process called formation, which should prepare them, both internally and externally, to live their religious life with integrity.

Begin with Prayer...

Reading: Galatians 1:15-18, 24

But when (God), who from my mother's womb had set me apart and called me through his grace, was pleased to reveal his Son to me, so that I might proclaim him to the Gentiles, I did not immediately consult flesh and blood, nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me; rather, I went into Arabia and then returned to Damascus. Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to confer with Kephas and remained with him for fifteen days ...Then I went into the regions of Syria and Cilicia. And I was unknown personally to the churches of Judea that are in Christ; they only kept hearing that "the one who once was persecuting us is now preaching the faith he once tried to destroy." So they glorified God because of me.

Reflection on the Theme of the Day:

Although a person becomes a professed religious in a moment (through profession of vows), and one becomes a priest in a moment (through the Sacrament of Holy Orders), preparing for this vocation takes a long time and a structured process, called formation. The Apostles were formed by Jesus Himself, and ever since then there has been some process to prepare Jesus' disciples for formal service to the Church. The passage we just read from St. Paul's Letter to the Galatians describes his process of formation, which lasted for several years. It was only after a lengthy apprenticeship that he was able to begin his incredible mission of evangelization.

Constitution 6 of the Constitutions of the Congregation of Holy Cross describes our philosophy towards the formation process: "We pronounce our vows in a moment, but living them for the sake of the kingdom is the work of a lifetime. That fulfillment demands of us more than the mere wish, more even than the firm decision. It demands the conversion of our habits, our character, our attitudes, our desires." There are several stages in the formation process in Holy Cross:

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Session Nine:

Being Formed into a Man of God

*Constitution 6: Formation and
Transformation, paragraphs 57-79*



- **Old College:** College-age men who are ready to begin religious formation enter a college formation program. In Holy Cross, this typically includes a man's freshman, sophomore and junior years of college. The Old College Program includes:
 - Formation conferences dealing with various aspects of priesthood and religious life.
 - A structured schedule of prayer, including daily Mass, common prayer twice daily, spiritual direction, liturgical training, retreats, and personal prayer.
 - The study of undergraduate philosophy, in preparation for later graduate studies in theology. Old Collegians are free to major in other disciplines, as long as they complete their philosophy requirement.
 - Supervised pastoral ministry placements.
 - Community life

- **Postulant Program:** Men who are preparing for the Novitiate (either seniors from Old College, or new men entering formation with a college degree) participate in the Postulant Program, which features:
 - Formation conferences giving an overview of priesthood and religious life in Holy Cross.
 - A structured schedule of prayer, including daily Mass, common prayer twice daily, spiritual direction, liturgical training, retreats, and personal prayer.
 - The study of undergraduate Philosophy, in preparation for later graduate studies in Theology.
 - Supervised pastoral ministry placements.
 - Community Life with older seminarians and finally professed religious in Moreau Seminary.

- **Novitiate:** All religious men and women must complete a year-long Novitiate. Novices are apprentices in the vowed life, and Holy Cross's Novitiate is a monastic environment that gives Novices ample time and silence for prayer and labor.
 - Daily formation conferences offering an in-depth treatment of religious vows, the Congregation of Holy Cross, and preparation for religious life.
 - Daily Mass, common praying of the entire Liturgy of the Hours, periods of common meditation, retreats and days of reflection.
 - Daily periods of silence.
 - Supervised pastoral ministry placements.

- **Temporarily Professed Program:** After the Novitiate, men take temporary vows of poverty, chastity and obedience and



return to Moreau Seminary.

- Formation conferences giving an in-depth look at priesthood and religious vows.
- The same structured prayer life they experienced as Postulants, plus the opportunity to preside and preach at some liturgical prayer.
- The study of graduate theology in the Notre Dame Master of Divinity Program.
- Supervised pastoral ministry placements, assuming greater leadership in their ministry.
- Leadership opportunities that allow them to help shape community life at Moreau Seminary.

The process from entry to final profession takes at least 9 years for a college freshman, and 6 for a college graduate, giving ample time for in-depth discernment and adequate formation. It is a long process, but that allows formation to be more than just education or job training; rather, it allows sufficient time to conform a man into the image of Christ the High Priest.

Personal Witness

Having already heard an overview of the Holy Cross formation, participants will now be ready to hear what a lived experience of formation looks like. This talk should share the highs and lows of your own formation process, as well as the lasting benefits you have realized as a result of your formation.

- Describe the process of formation, year by year. Address the highlights of each year, highlighting how you grew each year in each of the pillars of formation: spiritual, intellectual, human, pastoral and community development.
- How did your experience in formation prepare you for life as a finally professed Holy Cross priest or brother?

For Group Discussion

- Why do you think the formation process takes so long? What might be some of the benefits of a lengthy formation process?
- Some people think that you have to be certain about your vocation before you enter a formation program. In reality, though, some discernment must take place in formation. How do you think your discernment would change if you entered a formation program? How do you think a man becomes surer about his vocation as he advances in the formation program?
- How do you think you might benefit from living in a community of men seriously discerning a vocation to

priesthood or religious life (as opposed to discerning your vocation on your own)? In what ways do you hope this

Take aways

Talk to a priest or religious you know and admire about their time in formation. Get their personal story about how they grew and developed as a result of the formation process.

Closing...



Theme for the Day:

Religious congregations and orders are structured so that they can be more effective in their mission and more true to their charism.

Begin with Prayer...

Reading: Gospel of Matthew 20:25-28

But Jesus summoned them and said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and the great ones make their authority over them felt. But it shall not be so among you. Rather, whoever wishes to be great among you shall be your servant; whoever wishes to be first among you shall be your slave. Just so, the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many."

Reflection on the Theme of the Day:

No religious community can function without some structures in place to govern it. Religious must know how to lead, but they also must know how to follow, since those in authority should not necessarily mimic secular leaders. As Jesus tells His Apostles in the passage we just read from Matthew's Gospel, religious leaders are called not to be served, but to serve.

That is the sensibility that underlies the structures in Holy Cross. These structures aren't about people having power, they are about making us more effective in our mission. As stated in Constitution 7 of the Constitutions of the Congregation of Holy Cross, "There can be no community among us unless our common life and mission are governed by deliberations and decisions that draw us all towards a unity of thought, sentiment and action. To those deliberations and decisions we are all obligated as men pledged to obedience both to contribute and to respond."

Superiors are elected by the membership at regular meetings called Chapters. Holy Cross is governed at the international level by the Superior General, who lives in Rome. He is assisted by a General Council. The Congregation is then divided into geographic divisions called Provinces. Each Province is governed by a Superior, called a Provincial. The Provincial, assisted by his council, is responsible for everything taking place in his Province, including assigning personnel to ministries, caring for older and infirm religious, forming

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Ten:

Leadership and Service

*Constitution 7. Authority and
Responsibility, paragraphs 80-111*



seminarians and promoting vocations. Each individual community within a Province (be it a university, parish, or retirement community) has a superior responsible for how religious life is lived in that local community. Some areas are known as Districts. These are typically mission territories that are not yet ready to govern or finance themselves, so they are under the authority of a Province.

Ultimately, every Holy Cross religious must be willing to lead and willing to follow, depending on the needs of the Congregation and the Church at any given time. Given the shortage of priests and religious in our nation, it is common for religious to assume a lot of responsibility early in their religious life. Therefore, we must never lose sight of Jesus' call to see leadership not as a power play, but as an act of service.


Personal Witness

This talk should give participants some insights into what it looks like to assume leadership and authority as a religious vowed to obedience. Therefore this talk should focus on your own experiences of leadership as a religious.

- In what respects have you been an authority figure during your time in religious life? This can include authority roles in ministry (such as dorm rector or pastor of a parish) as well as formal authority roles in the Province.
- In what way has authority been a blessing? In what way has it made you a better priest or religious?
- How have positions of authority affected your attitudes toward the vows, especially the vow of obedience?
- How do you assent to decisions made by authority figures within the Church or the Congregation with which you struggle?
- What is it like to be someone's brother in community and yet be their superior (or have them be your superior) at the same time? What are some healthy ways you have navigated these relationships?
- What are some important qualities in a good religious superior?

For Group Discussion

- Who are some people with formal authority over you in your current state in life? Based on these relationships, what are some qualities that make you respect someone as a leader? How can good leadership make priests and brothers more effective in their ministry?
- Based on your experiences, what are some qualities that you consider detrimental to good leadership?

- 
- Describe a time when you have had formal authority over other people. How comfortable did you feel in that role? How were you able to be an effective and decisive leader while still being pastoral and charitable?
 - How do you handle questions or doubts you have about leadership or teachings within the Church? What do you think the healthy way to address these questions is?

Take aways

Think of a relationship in which you hold formal or informal authority over other people, and think of one virtue that you would like to deepen in this role. Make an effort to be intentional about practicing this virtue in the coming weeks.

Closing...

Theme for the Day:

Each of us will encounter the Cross in our lives. If we want to be men with hope to bring to others, as Holy Cross religious are called to be, we must first learn to carry our own crosses daily.

Begin with Prayer...

Reading: Gospel of John 15:19-20

If you belonged to the world, the world would love its own; but because you do not belong to the world, and I have chosen you out of the world, the world hates you. Remember the word I spoke to you, 'No slave is greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you.

Reflection on the Theme of the Day:

The Cross of Christ is central to the spirituality of Holy Cross. Jesus told His disciples that they would need to take up their cross daily and follow Him, and in the passage we just read from the Gospel of John, He assured us that if we are faithful to Him, we will encounter the Cross in our own lives.

Holy Cross religious are called to be "men with hope to bring," but if we are going to do this authentically, then we must be able to carry the crosses we encounter in our own lives. Constitution 8 of the Constitutions of the Congregation of Holy Cross is a beautiful reflection on the Cross. It states, "Jesus entered into the pain and death that sin inflicts. He accepted the torment but gave us joy in return. We whom He has sent to minister amid the same sin and pain must know that we too shall find the cross and the hope it promises. The face of every human being who suffers is for us the face of Jesus who mounted the cross to take the sting out of death. Ours must be the same cross and the same hope."

We carry the same crosses as other people in our culture: health issues, struggles in interpersonal relationships, job-related stress, failures in our work. We also share the crosses of people we love.


We also carry some crosses that are more specific to our lives as priests and brothers: the tragedy and suffering that we witness in the lives of the people to whom we minister; extensive demands of work, especially in light of the shortage of priests and religious; the type of loneliness that can come

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Session Eleven:

Embracing the Cross of Christ in Our Lives

*Constitution & The Cross, Our
Hope, paragraphs 112-117*



without an exclusive relationship; the seeming futility of our work in the face of an overwhelmingly secular culture; and frustrations in community, particularly since we do not choose the people with whom we live. The healthy living of religious life demands that we find hope in these crosses so that we can carry them with dignity. It is only in taking up these crosses daily that we can truly be men with hope to bring to others who struggle under the weight of their own crosses.

Personal Witness

This talk should focus on some of the ways that you have experienced the Cross in your own life as a religious. In discussing your personal experience, it would be preferable to discuss stories that are personal without being overly confessional. This talk should help participants understand that religious life is not free of its challenges, but that the way we handle these challenges can bear fruit for the Kingdom.

- Based on the examples of suffering in the Discussion Outline above, select some stories from your own personal experience which your audience might be able to envision easily. Describe how these challenges came about, how you approached them, how they were eventually resolved, and what you learned from them.
- How has your role as a priest or brother brought you into closer contact with the Cross of Christ? How has your religious life been a source of hope that helps you carry these crosses? How have the struggles you have encountered in ministry and community brought you closer to the Lord?

For Group Discussion

- What is our secular culture's attitude towards suffering? How do you see this attitude manifested in social practices such as euthanasia and abortion?
- Name a time when you've seen someone going through a difficult time in a way that exemplified Christian hope. How did their behavior and attitude inspire you? Did their example change the way you look at your own sufferings?
- What are some unhealthy tendencies you fall into when things are difficult? What are some of the healthier ways you have adopted to deal with such difficulties?
- How could experiences of suffering hinder your ability to minister to others who suffer? How could experiences of suffering help you minister to others more effectively?



Takeaways

Identify one area in your life where you are prone to despair or self-pity. Identify some resources (prayer, friends, counseling) that you could use to work through these feelings.

Closing...

Theme for the Day:

Having learned to carry the Cross in our own lives, Holy Cross religious have a special commitment to help others find hope in the midst of their sufferings.

Begin with Prayer...

Reading: Gospel of John 19:25-27

Standing by the cross of Jesus were his mother and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary of Magdala. When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple there whom he loved, he said to his mother, "Woman, behold, your son." Then he said to the disciple, "Behold, your mother." And from that hour the disciple took her into his home.

Reflection on the Theme of the Day:

In our last session, we discussed the crosses that each of us carries in our own life, because we must learn to find hope in the Cross. As an apostolic order, we are then expected to go out and bring that hope to others who suffer. This is exactly what Jesus did from the Cross. In His moment of greatest suffering, He not only took care of His mother's immediate material needs (giving her a home and some security), but He took care of all of us by giving us Mary to be the Mother of the Church.

In Holy Cross, the Cross is an integral part of our spirituality. Ironically, we were not named after the Cross of Christ, but rather after the town of Ste Croix in France. The Cross, however, became a significant part of our spirituality, and Fr. Moreau chose Ave Crux, Spes Unica (Hail the Cross, our Only Hope) as our motto. Our Constitutions state that our place in the Church is beside Mary at the foot of the Cross, gazing at the suffering Body of Christ with a spirit of hope.

Constitution 8 of the Constitutions of the Congregation of Holy Cross states, "We do not grieve as men without hope, for Christ the Lord has risen to die no more. He has taken us into the mystery and the grace of this life that springs up from death. If we, like Him encounter and accept suffering in our discipleship, we will move without awkwardness among others who suffer. We must be men with hope to bring. There is no failure the Lord's love cannot reverse, no humiliation He cannot exchange for blessing, no anger He cannot dissolve,

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Session Twelve:

Becoming a Man with Hope to Bring

*Constitution & The Cross Our
Hope, paragraphs 118-123*



no routine He cannot transfigure. All is swallowed up in victory. He has nothing but gifts to offer. It remains only for us to find how even the cross can be borne as a gift." It is this hope in the Cross of Christ that guides our ministry, and we encounter the suffering Body of Christ in ministry every day. In many of our apostolates, we encounter people living in extreme material poverty. In every apostolate, though, we encounter people living in spiritual poverty. No one is immune from suffering, and once you scratch beneath the surface you will find that many people experience a great deal of pain in their lives. They should expect to find consolation and hope in the Church, and Holy Cross religious should be a source of that hope. We may not be able to solve everyone's problems or meet their physical needs, but if we have confidence in the Cross as our only hope, then we will have something meaningful to offer to others who suffer.


Personal Witness

While the previous session described how Holy Cross religious might encounter the Cross in their own lives, this talk should focus on how we encounter the Cross in ministry. This should give participants an understanding of how being a Holy Cross religious helps us to be an instrument of God's love to those who suffer:

- Describe a few stories of how you encountered suffering in your ministry. Diverse examples would help, perhaps some accounts of material and physical suffering, balanced with accounts of spiritual and emotional suffering.
- What was it like to be the face of the Church to the people you encountered?
- How did you handle encounters where you were powerless to "fix" the situation? How did you minister to people then?
- Have there been ways that you could minister to such people in a special way because of your identity as a priest or brother?
- Have you witnessed glimpses of the Resurrection in your encounters with the Cross in ministry? Discuss some times when you were able to help others find hope.
- How do you avoid being weighed down by the combined suffering of the people you meet in the course of your ministry?

For Group Discussion

- Holy Cross sees our place as standing at the foot of the Cross beside the Blessed Mother. How do you think Mary remained hopeful as she stood at the Cross?
- Have you participated in any service work ministering to the



poor, sick or others who suffer? What was this experience like for you? How do you keep from losing hope when exposed to that kind of suffering? How can the Church effectively minister to such people?

- Consider your immediate everyday context. What is some of the greatest suffering you see around you on a daily basis?
- How can a priest or brother avoid burnout when working among extreme suffering?

Take aways

Pick one person whom you see on a regular basis whom you know is suffering in body, mind or spirit. Commit to pray for that person every day for the next week.

Closing...

