Policy Statement on Higher Education

Indiana Province
Congregation of Holy Cross
POLICY STATEMENT ON HIGHER EDUCATION

OUR COMMITMENT TO HIGHER EDUCATION

1. The Congregation of Holy Cross came to the New World in 1841, only four years after it had been established. From early days—with the founding of a college at Notre Dame in 1842—the band of laymen and clerics entered intrepidly into the intellectual enterprise of higher education. The universities of Notre Dame and Portland (1902) continue as major commitments of the Indiana Province today.

2. The extent of that commitment shows forth from the fact that more than one-fourth of the perpetually professed members of our Province are now working in the field of higher education, or have passed from educational careers into other work, or are in direct preparation for that professional ministry. If one also considers our confreres retired from careers in this work, one-third of our members have been active in this ministry, more than in any other, including parish work.

3. The significance of our traditional involvement is also visible in our sources of new membership. Half of our priests ordained in the past decade became acquainted with the community through our institutions of higher education. Sixty-five percent of all younger, temporarily professed members came to our Province through our university work. The professional excellence of every one of our diverse ministries has been notably enhanced by our vital connections to these centers of learning.

4. Jesus said he came as witness to a confounding truth, which he honored by courageous speech and at the cost of his own life. He said he came to speak the truth, and that he was himself the truth and life. Belief in him as Lord has led those who loved Jesus to love learning and to love those who learn. Scholarship and teaching and the formation of youth are an ancient commitment in the Christian church. We acknowledge that purposeful commitment as a ministry for which we have striven to be adept.

5. In our Indiana Province nine out of every ten of us in the profession of higher education hold appointments in institutions sponsored by Holy Cross. Unlike religious orders whose qualified members are scattered as free-lance academics across a variety of state and independent campuses, Holy Cross personnel have preferred to work as communities in our own universities so as to have an effect that is corporate as well as individual. Our service in this ministry is, just as in most others, delivered by us as a community, rather than as single professionals.

6. Our original purpose was twofold. Where education was an unfulfilled need, we wanted to make it available. For poor youth whom life offered few choices, we would give our service freely so that they could afford higher learning and could thereby advance their station and their capacity for service in society. For brilliant students we would make an increasingly sophisticated inquiry possible. To all students, academic and professional, we would extend a program of learning that could not only induct them into their culture and prepare them to support their families, but share with them a wisdom about the worth of knowledge and how it might be integrated into a reflective life. We had a second, inseparable purpose. As we were servants of Christ, we wanted to call our students to share that satisfaction. In colleges and universities that were themselves Catholic communities, we wanted to give faith its high place among the pursuits of the mind and the commitments of the heart.
Higher Education Has Changed for Holy Cross

7. As our universities have matured they have taken on three further foundational purposes. First, they have pursued learning well beyond the immediate needs and reach of undergraduates. As scholars we now engage in and initiate advanced students into research that ministers to the furthest curiosities of a fellowship of learning that is world-wide, not campus-wide. Second, as scholars of a Catholic institution we now actively share and lead in understanding, interpreting and articulating humanistic, artistic, scientific and technical knowledge from a consciously Christian, Catholic perspective. Third, we have heard a call to turn learning to service. The grace and advantage of education at a great Christian university must find completion, not only in the savor and satisfaction of knowledge, but in its application to the needs of the most needy. So great have been these new developments, it is as if we had witnessed a re-founding of our universities.

8. We have also become much more aware of a social dimension to all these purposes, a dimension that gives our work a finality beyond the individual benefits to our students. Education brings their talents to fuller development so that they may participate competently and effectively in constructing a just society and a wholesome culture. We expose their human minds to the insight of faith, so that they may take their influential place in both the church and the cultural and political order with more profound inquiry and sound and independent judgment, sustained and challenged by the intellectual ferment of a believing fellowship. We invite them into active collaboration with scholars and experts who deal firsthand in new inquiry and research, to serve society's needs and questions. And our call to turn learning to service is not only a summons to personal virtue but also a plea to lay creative hands on society and fashion collaborative programs to relieve deprivation and oppression throughout the nation and the world.

9. Originally we constituted nearly the entire faculty and staff of these universities; now Holy Cross is surrounded by a great complement of colleagues.

10. There has also been a shift in our clientele. When our universities offered primarily their resourcefulness and religious character, we served the children of Catholic immigrants, and local students. With every step forward in academic accomplishment the education we offer is or will be able also to attract students from families for whom both the actively Catholic character and the competitively academic quality and the availability of financial aid are all important to their choices.

11. In earlier years our institutions, like most religiously affiliated colleges, kept to themselves. Now they are much more involved in the national and international professional associations of higher education, and they are affected by peer institutions through competition, accreditation and collaboration. As institutions and as professionals we are more exposed to the international canons of scholarship than once we were. The influence flows both ways. We are, as we were not before, able to offer our own voice and our own experience in the world of higher education.

12. The relationship of Holy Cross to our institutions is not what it originally was. As a religious congregation we now collaborate with laypeople on boards of fellows, trustees and regents that we ourselves have welcomed into being. We have yielded sole trusteeship in favor of a partnership in governance. There is a difference between sovereign legal control and a participation that requires of us an articulate moral influence. We are willingly obliged to give an account of our educational
convictions to our colleagues, and to exert ourselves to be effectively persuasive in widely participatory policy-making.

13. Another change affects us as Holy Cross religious more immediately. Our apostolate of higher education was established by men who expected themselves to function simultaneously as classroom teachers, residence hall staff, campus administrators, chaplains, and weekend assistants for nearby parishes. As canons of excellence have risen to make each of those roles more demanding we have adjusted our patterns of service. We continue to devote our greatest efforts to our primary university assignments while we still try to be proficient in other professional commitments as well. We consider it to be of the very nature of our special worth to the institutions that our investments in teaching and research, in ministry and in campus life all reinforce one another and bind together the several components of our distinctive educational tradition. We want to be both competitive and diversified in our educational services. We see this as enhancing our professional competence, not diluting it. Universities which offer a diversified and integrated program of study and community need professionals who themselves embody exactly that melding of competence and diversity.

WE WOULD NOT FORFEIT OUR DISTINCTIVE PURPOSES

14. In our dominant culture every religious institution is drawn downward by an undertow of secularization. The more our own universities excel and compete academically, the greater the temptation to be bashful about our Christian commitments, to lose confidence in what is special in our mission, and to blend into the dogmatic indifference of a secular society.

15. Most institutions of higher education cannot or do not pursue all the aims of a Christian education. Some that were founded with this ministry in mind now remember it only as a "tradition" or a "heritage," which simply means that those presently responsible have stopped believing in what their predecessors strove for.

16. Are we bettering, or are we abandoning, our foundational purposes and priorities? Excellence in each single aspect of Christian higher education requires rigorous discipline; but excellence in all aspects bound together requires a comprehensive vision that puts all competencies to a complex and higher purpose. Our ultimate worry now is not that our enterprise of higher education may not survive, but that it might not survive with chosen effect. It could end up as a work and as a profession, but not as a ministry of Christian faith. Our primary motive must be to become more faithful and effective disciples of Christ, and to share that same calling with our colleagues and students. If that is just a job or a profession, then for us it would be a failure.

THE OTHERS WHO HAVE A STAKE IN OUR INSTITUTIONS: FACULTY, ADMINISTRATION AND STAFF

17. Our goals for the educational institutions we have founded and sponsor and co-govern obviously exceed the resources of Holy Cross alone, and so we naturally extend our concern and our aspirations to those who join us in our work, to assure that they join us also in our hope. The first constituency that come to mind is composed of our fellow professionals. As the community which founded the universities and continues to sponsor and co-govern them, Holy Cross is asking our professional colleagues to regard their involvements, not as mere academic or professional appointments, but as an
enlargement of their gifts and convictions that will contribute to a shared vision of education. Our unique role at the institutions we founded, co-govern and continue to serve obliges us to urge upon those with whom we work a loyalty to the distinctive character of those universities, and to the additional claims it makes upon all who accept a professional appointment there.

18. Like us, they are influenced both by the purposes and priorities of their institution, and by the conventions and the norms of their profession. As academic enterprises our universities have improved considerably by the standards of the professional educational community. Even as residential colleges, an aspect in which we have been especially successful, we have benefited from some of the challenges and examples of the national and international collegiate experience. Our effectiveness in research is due in large part to competitive emulation of the best graduate schools.

19. But our colleagues, who like us are mostly veterans of universities that do not share our joint commitment both to faith and to learning, may not always come to our institutions on the unusual terms that are essential to their existence. Those unusual priorities of our institutions require the active ascent of all of us together. We do not imagine that we of Holy Cross could ever succeed in holding our universities to their foundational purposes if our colleagues on the faculty and staff were hostile or indifferent to what is distinctive and essential about these institutions. We acknowledge our task to articulate and advocate the Catholic character and commitments of Holy Cross universities so as to secure the responsible collaboration of our colleagues.

20. Holy Cross people tend to be drawn by our communal sponsorship, whatever each one’s particular post or rank, to see issues not merely from the perspective of a single department or discipline. We know how easy it is to be more narrowly concerned about one’s own segment of the enterprise. We have to take it as one of our tasks to associate all our colleagues more with the total mission and needs of the universities.

21. We in Holy Cross must make our way as teaching scholars or as professional administrators and staff. Not untypically many of us have a hand in both roles. For much of our history we have provided most of the senior staff in the residence halls. And we continue—brothers as well as priests—to offer an extensive pastoral ministry. In addition, there is the expectation that Holy Cross take a prominent and active part in public relations for our institutions.

22. It is possible for an educator to have interests and competence so narrowly defined that one leaves the broad agenda of the institution to be met, not by oneself or any other individual, but by a medley of professionals who may little care or think about what occurs beyond their own working unit. On the other hand one can offer a distracting lot of involvements as an excuse for one’s overall mediocrity. Like every one of our colleagues, we have to be both rigorous and diversified in our competence and service. We have reservations about a hyper-specialization that may fix its sights too narrowly on what is important at a university—as if it were research alone, for instance. This is no idiosyncrasy of Holy Cross. We propose it as a sound model for any professional who works alongside us at our—and their—universities.

23. The veteran faculty and staff came to our universities knowing that it would entail some financial sacrifice. To make that sacrifice they had to believe in some explicit way, as we do, in the worthwhile advantage of our kind of higher education. As job openings become
scarcer and as our institutions gain access to better financing, there is stronger incentive to take up an appointment on our campuses with no particular appreciation or even notice of our distinctive commitment and tradition. We in Holy Cross acknowledge our own obligations to catalyze that awareness and solidarity, and we call on the academic leaders to do the same, in season and out of season.

STUDENTS

24. Both academic competition and additional financial cost impose a selectivity on our admission process that assures us of students who have distinct reasons for wanting to study with us. There are, however, others with even higher motivation whose access is blocked because their means cannot meet the costs of an independent institution. Our universities must find ways and means to welcome them, for our commitment is to those in need.

25. Some of our students may not yet understand, when they come to our campuses, what they stand to gain there. They may value a fine training for a lucrative career more than they do an academic challenge; the popular reputation of our universities more than their Catholic character; or carousing more than the intellectual life. We must provide our students not only with a learning opportunity that is both encouraging and rigorous but also with an appreciation of what an authentic education really is. The hope that lives in our work comes in large part from the sight of what our own graduates have gone on to do and to be.

26. While they are with us we must provide our students with a cogent and worthy exposition of the gospel, centered in active and intelligible and reverent worship. In a community of both scholarship and faith, one household within a great church, learned students will be more curious and profound, and dedicated students will be wiser.

PARENTS, BENEFACTORS AND ALUMNI

27. It is a legitimate expectation of parents that at university age their children need a fuller and more considered initiation into the wider tradition of both thinking and believing than the typical family household can provide. We want what they want for their children, our students. We are among the agents of that wider community of thought and belief into which their children come to be initiated.

28. Parents and benefactors may sometimes imagine that the Holy Cross hegemony on campus is extensive and rigid enough to enforce a learning atmosphere and a respectable style of life among our students. Their hope might be that young people who may have lacked or eluded the finishing touches (or, for that matter, even the fundamentals) of a civilized life at home would be strenuously required to shape up at our schools.

29. And with parents we sometimes reciprocate misgivings. Some of their children are discernibly less docile or religiously observant than were the parents. Students, on the other hand, sometimes sense a religious investment by their parents that is too perfunctory, and is unready to sacrifice much on its behalf. We, their parents' contemporaries and associates, have all the more work to do to initiate our students into that life-giving tradition.

30. One of the great gifts Holy Cross religious have traditionally given to our students is the gift of personal friendship. In an era when one is tempted by age or professional status or burdensome responsibilities to keep relationships on a role-limited plane, it is good to remind ourselves what this gift has meant to generations of students ... and to Holy Cross priests and brothers.

31. It is from our former students that we can gain a most valuable commentary on what we do as educators. In this sense our alumni are
for our Congregation and for our universities a critical voice of conscience.

PASTORS IN THE CHURCH

32. Higher education has found in the Catholic Church sometimes an enlightened patron and sometimes a doctrinaire adversary. At various times and places the faith has brought smugness and intimidation and the fear of open inquiry, when by rights it should have enlivened the mind's work. Academics, in their turn, have periodically ignored the dependence of their faith on the believing community and on those who preside over its deliberations. But authoritative voices among both pastors and intellectuals have agreed that as truth can never be in conflict with truth, so faith need not be afraid of open-minded inquiry. We aspire to bring to our universities the best that the church knows how to offer: intellectual rigor, persistent integration of disciplines, personal loyalty and comradeship, a conscience for social justice, and the illumination that divine faith brings to all the work of the human intellect.

33. There have been times when the higher clergy of our church looked askance at higher learning. We sense less of that in recent times. Teaching and shepherding in church and on campus have undergone some identical experiences. Bishops are as aware as professors are that their listeners are less likely to accept teaching on their simple say-so. Only by enlightening, by consistency, by meeting and resolving questions thoroughly and by courtesy in dissent can we persuade people or even gain a hearing from them. In that is truest authority. In that the academic functions very much like any pastor functions.

34. Our institutions are Catholic universities. They are not chartered by Rome as pontifical institutions, nor are they governed by the local bishops. They therefore lack that direct institutional control which the hierarchy understandably exercises over universities that they directly sponsor and govern. We join the bishops, however, in their docility to Christ's teaching, and look to them for pastoral leadership in the understanding and application of the gospel. A Catholic university is a place where the church does its thinking. We academics tend to do our thinking out loud, even on faith-related topics. Since as free associations of Catholics we are organic bodies through which the lifeblood of the church flows, the religious health of our universities depends on how sound the health and teaching of the church is at any given time, and on how able we are both to benefit by and to offer loyal and well-considered reconsideration to the received understandings of Christ's people. Though as institutions our universities must benefit by that wide ambit of respect we traditionally call academic freedom, we ourselves as communicants cannot expect to be immune from authoritative and critical comment if others, especially the church's shepherds, find our teaching to be askew. Ours must be a respectful freedom, if it is to be respected.

35. Church officers and agencies now openly ask for collaboration in policy formulation by academics, and give us in many disciplines an opportunity to learn and to teach in a broader lecture hall than that of our campuses.

PROPOSALS

36. Looking to the future, then, what do we propose to offer: to our colleagues in governance and in education, our students, our profession, the church, the world?

37. First: With increasingly high demands made on our priests and brothers in higher education, and more rigorous standards of performance, special measures are needed to help them enter and excel in this ministry. In particular, we have deployed financial support and time to younger confreres for graduate studies at the most selective universities. More recently the community
has been enabling members to be relieved of their work for sabbatical time to pursue advanced studies. Since our longstanding responsibilities in collateral fields—campus ministry, student affairs, residential life, counselling, etc.—mean so much to our students and to our institutions, we intend to encourage professional development for our members engaged in those services.

38. Second: We would expect that those universities which Holy Cross has established, co-governs and supports will value professional services on a range as broad as that of the institutions themselves. Every adjective by which a Catholic university wishes to describe itself must represent a quality that is sought and valued in its professional staff at every instance of evaluation. This applies to all who teach and serve, and we wish to claim it for ourselves as well. We ask for our work to be evaluated in all its breadth. In justice to our historic and preferential commitment to our related institutions, we believe that the multiplicity of roles and services we undertake must be taken into account at the points of first appointment, promotion and tenure. Our institutions are special to us. We expect to be special to them, with a distinctiveness of dedication and service, not of privilege.

39. We repeat that we do not consider this as an exclusive arrangement for Holy Cross. We would expect that since the faculty as a whole is expected to embody the character of our universities, then the full range of accomplishments any faculty member contributes to the total institution should by right be assessed and appreciated at every level of evaluation.

40. Third: We want to continue offering our service without financial gain. We contribute a portion of our salaries to our community’s administrative expense and we help support our youngest and oldest brethren: those who have yet to be trained for their work and those who have retired from it. We cover the costs of some of our own special ministries to our institutions. Beyond that we provide for our own keep, and we commit ourselves to review our standard of expenditure to assure that it is modest. The remainder of our salaries we return to our institutions.

41. Fourth: The sector of student life, including residential life and campus ministry and community service, will remain one to which we commit personnel and leadership. Since these ministries are all integrated into institutions of higher learning, we call on our affiliated universities to join us in encouraging student affairs personnel to undertake professional training and advanced studies themselves.

42. Fifth: We work with an increasing consciousness of our obligations and opportunities as vowed members of a worldwide brotherhood in a truly Catholic Church. We will make our foreign members and institutions available to our universities for collaborative study, research and service. In particular, we look to our foreign confreres as especially able to bring home to our United States students an awareness of the global society and of their duties to the world which our Christian faith demands: beginning with justice and persisting when more than justice is required. Without the companionship of enough minority students from their own country and other students from many cultures and countries (not just the affluent), this cannot be done.

43. Sixth: Holy Cross religious have associated with themselves predominantly lay boards of trustees and regents to continue and to enhance the universities we have founded and sponsored. We share with them the joint trust that must keep these institutions of higher education faithful to the purposes of their founding, not merely as a heritage of the past but as an undertaking whose promise has yet to be fully realized. We have chosen not to
retain governance in our exclusive control. Nevertheless we intended that change to intensify our universities' original reasons for existence, not to dissipate them. As a communal witness to the instinct that led to their founding and sustained continuity to make that past live on into the future and never be extinguished, we in Holy Cross wish to be represented by significant, stable and articulate presence on their institutional governing bodies of members chosen by and from the Congregation. They represent, not merely the interests of the religious who actually work there, but the purposes and the policies of the entire Province, for the ministry of higher education is precious to us all.

44. After this review of our current concerns, let it be said that we in Holy Cross who work in higher education acknowledge profound and enduring satisfaction in our calling. In furthering scholarship we ourselves continue to learn—and this is whether we work as faculty or in student affairs or in any other sector of the university. And by joining as a vowed community to do our work side-by-side as a brotherhood, we believe we bring to education a contribution beyond what would be possible for us simply as so many individuals.

Adapted from the Proceedings of the Provincial Chapter of 1988.

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