

# HOLY CROSS

T H E C H U R C H D E S E R V E S O U R B E S T



**“Teachers who are meek and who follow the example of Jesus Christ lose none of their authority and do not stress what is hard and severe in authority. They put themselves in their students' places. They avoid judging with harshness and anger and they do not rely on exaggerated confidence in themselves. They are always guided by a heart full of compassion and kindness and make their decisions without stubbornness and injustice.”**

—Rev. Basil Moreau, C.S.C.,  
Founder of Holy Cross



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## Signs of our Purpose



Every year in late August as a new academic year approaches, a hodge-podge of signs spray-painted on cardboard and plywood appears on campus roads and even along the Indiana Toll Road a few miles away. Strategically placed by various orientation crews, these graffiti-like emblems of dorm pride unofficially welcome and direct first-year students and parents to Notre Dame's 27 residence halls.

Some cash-deprived parents become understandably apprehensive upon encountering gems like “Zahm: the best six years of your life!” scrawled in red paint. Other

signs draw either laughter or confusion from newbies who don't yet understand the local humor in “Alumni Hall: Bathrooms like whoa!”

Nevertheless, they are all a colorful indication that every hall has a unique design, character, history, nickname, and person-in-charge called a “rector.” It is virtually an archaic title outside of Catholic seminaries and Notre Dame, but the rector is the capstone in the arch of the University's philosophy of residentiality. Inevitably, upon being introduced, two or more Irish alumni will ask one another what hall they lived in, and it won't take long before they begin trading

their favorite rector stories.

It was on January 1, 1889 that Fr. Andrew Morrissey, C.S.C., took the helm as first rector of Sorin Hall, the first Catholic residence in the United States with private rooms and named after the University of Notre Dame's legendary priest-founder. Morrissey later became its seventh president despite gloomily predicting that Notre Dame was destined to remain little more than a glorified boarding school because “We can never compete with those colleges that have such tremendous endowments.” Not until 1913 when Knute Rockne and Gus Dorais



Fr. John (J) Steele, C.S.C., is currently serving in his fifth year as rector of a refurbished Manor while also working in Campus ministry and the Vocation Office.

blew away football powerhouse Army 35–10 with the forward pass would the University’s potential be more grossly underrated.

Fr. Matthew Walsh, C.S.C., Notre Dame’s tenth president, graciously did his part to protect Morrissey’s legacy by naming a residence hall after him. Ironically, however, that namesake succeeded in living down to his low expectations when in 1996 “Morrissey Manor,” as it is called by residents, was voted the worst college dorm in America by *Link* magazine. It was renovated a year later.

A few other future presidents like Burns, Walsh, and Hesburgh followed in Morrissey’s path as rectors first. They had a sunnier outlook about the University’s prospects, which goes to show that rectors are a varied lot even when they are next-door neighbors in nearly identical collegiate Gothic buildings.

In 1978 Fr. George Rozum, C.S.C., moved onto the South Quad and took the helm at Alumni Hall, home of the “Dawgs.” In his early days, he was renowned for pacing the hallways with a small can of yellow paint and brush covering corridor nicks until 4:00 a.m. It was also a sneaky means of spying out overactive Dawgs engaging in too much late-night revelry without being too obvious.

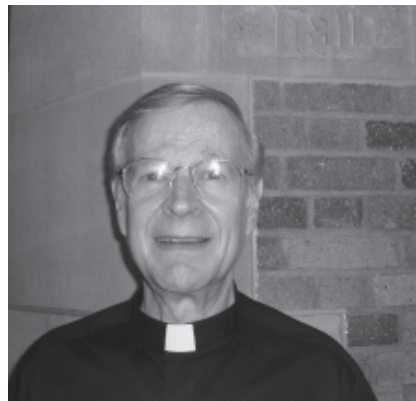
Alumni quickly became recognized as the cleanest hall on campus. Lint was meticulously

picked; greasy fingerprints evaporated instantaneously from crystal chandeliers; and brass door handles were scrubbed by harried hall stewards who looked a little like English chimney sweeps after a long day’s toil. A person can still comb his or her hair in the mirror finish of the chapel’s floor tiles.

At the same time, across the courtyard in Dillon under the rector-

ship of then Fr. Dan Jenky, C.S.C., a couple of thousand (mostly) empty cans of Hamms and Natty Light, not to mention scores of distilled spirits bottles, would regularly spill out of swollen trash chutes, flooding hallways on Sunday afternoons after a weekend of toga-clad enthusiasm had ground reluctantly to a halt. Two days later the place would still smell like a New Jersey landfill as vile beer soaked through the subfloor—though the “Big Red” did put on a great pep rally, sing lustful songs, and win a few more interhall football championships than most.

Now in his 27th year, Fr. George is still the Top Dawg in Alumni. He is celebrating the recent arrival of new French windows and renovated bathrooms that would not look out of place at Versailles. He is also nearing the record for longest-serving rector ever while Jenky has merely ascended the ecclesiastical ranks to



Fr. George Rozum, C.S.C. at the main entrance of the Dawg Pound.

become Bishop of Peoria. One job might be more important, but the other produces far more entertaining tales.

Rozum’s closest competitor is Fr. Tom Gaughan, C.S.C., rector of Stanford Hall for 13 years. Several years ago, he managed to convince his 18- to 22-year-old residents to change their names from “Studs” to “Griffins” after a longtime Holy Cross priest and former rector, now deceased. It is somewhat gratifying and perhaps revealing that Notre Dame students would suppress the natural impulse to boast of their manhood in order to honor a priest from an earlier era only their fathers and mothers would have known.

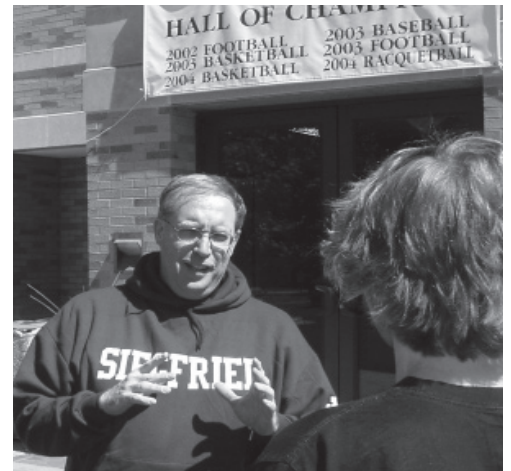
Many rectors have other jobs, part or full-time. Fr. Rob Moss, C.S.C., skipper of the Fisher Green Wave, works in Admissions. Fr. Pete Jarret, C.S.C., works hard to corral the Keough ‘Roos while serving full-time as Counselor to the President. Fr. Jim King, C.S.C., at Sorin scours the campus for the next generation of rectors as Holy Cross’ vocation director.

Fr. Mark Thesing, C.S.C., in Keenan and Bro. Jerome Meyer, C.S.C., in Knott are renowned for their extensive hall food service operations. In fact, Bro. Jerome puts on a full-scale Thanksgiving dinner for those who can’t make it home for turkey, then spends finals week in his chef’s hat cooking vats of late-night chili.

Fr. John Conley, C.S.C., is tied with Fr. Paul Doyle, C.S.C., for the third longest tenure among Holy Cross rectors. He takes particular pride in having established a modern-day football powerhouse as “priest-owner” of the Siegfried Ramblers,

advancing to the championship game three times and winning it the last two.

Today’s Holy Cross rectors range in age from 31 to 65, with all sorts of backgrounds, degrees, and interests, yet they would universally agree with Fr. Conley’s assertion that “I became a rector because I believe it is a critical way for Holy Cross to teach and serve at Notre Dame. It is like being a pastor and teacher all rolled into one. I like to think that in some way I am doing my part to teach and form the future leaders of our Church.” They



Fr. John Conley, C.S.C., hawking the “Hall of Champions.”

are all educators in the faith outside the classroom where students must learn how to live.

The endowment’s growth past \$3 billion, 800+ all-time football victories, and a consistent top-20 rating among American universities garner frequent notice in the national press, yet it is the daily routine within the residence halls, whether historic, dump, or cinderblock and prison-like, which most shapes the daily rhythms of campus. It is also the rectors who define and preserve these hallowed places as communities of faith, friendship, and learning.

Today, despite many changes in residential life over the years and many more halls, Holy Cross priests and brothers still fill nearly half the rector positions. It is an integral part of the community’s mission, and, while now shared with other lay people, sisters,

brothers, and priests, the role of the rector remains critical in maintaining a campus ethos where more than 80 percent of students live on campus and frequently speak of their residential experience as the most important component of their undergraduate years. Only at Notre Dame would college students not find it odd to see adults in their 60s staying up regularly past two in the morning wandering dormitory hallways and tending to their eclectic mix of needs.

Rectors are hunted down for drill bits and hammers to help finish off a loft or to repair a leaky ice machine. They encourage freshmen dressing up in Easter Bunny costumes to raise money for poor kids' candy baskets, and they volunteer to be targets for charity pie-throwing contests. They balance their attendance at football, soccer, and lacrosse games with handing out fines, assessing community service hours, and occasionally providing bail for the same people they have cheered for on the field a day or week before.

And each year there are a handful of real crises—surgeries, car accidents, psychological emergencies, family illnesses, and parents' deaths—which they weave into their own and the hall's prayer through Mass petitions and late-night Grotto visits. All the while, rectors strive to stay on course filling out maintenance reports, helping out with retreats, writing recommendation letters, arguing ecclesiological fine points, encouraging vocations, tracking lost keys, hearing confessions, and stuffing residents full of coffee, donuts, Mountain Dew—and chili—during the sleep-deprived craziness of finals' week.

There is undoubtedly some truth in the theory that halls eventually take on their rectors' personalities, particularly when they remain in place for more than a decade. And students quickly note and freely comment, sometimes endearingly and occasionally not, upon their rectors' idiosyncrasies.

And there is a corollary—that, in the end, students will forgive one who is prone to excitability, preaches dully, or is hopelessly disorganized so long as that rector does his best to keep the door open, to know them, to listen, and to care for them. That's especially true in those difficult moments when a student faces his first crushing disappointment and no light appears at the end of a long, dark tunnel save the flicker of encouragement offered by the old goat with the archaic title still awake in the weeest hours.

Despite the national priest shortage and the fact that many have other positions on campus, some students get impatient when rectors are not sitting around 24/7 waiting for the next knock on the door. It's something of a backhanded compliment, which only reinforces that Holy Cross must be

doing something necessary and desirable if it has managed to create an expectation that rectors are needed throughout the day—and even more at night.

The Congregation's founder, Fr. Basil Moreau, C.S.C., insisted that education outside of the classroom was as important as what takes place within it and demanded that community members live side by side with students. There are other universities with gobs of smart people that often win more football games, but "There is probably no great educational institution in the country in which students learn to know one another more intimately than they do at Notre Dame. Friendships are formed here that last a lifetime."

The quote is not recent, though it well characterizes the typical Domer's contemporary experience. In fact, it comes from the

*Thirty-ninth Catalogue*, an early handbook of student life written in 1883. The residential character of Notre Dame is sometimes taken for granted, but it was always part of the general plan and can be traced back to the University's earliest days. Despite living in vastly different eras, Holy Cross priests and brothers today sound remarkably like their forebears, Sorin and Moreau.

Fr. Theodore Hesburgh, C.S.C., president emeritus, once wrote, "While I personally have been greatly concerned with turning out graduates who are intellectually competent, I am even more concerned with turning out students who are deeply compassionate." The principle comes straight from the playbook of Fr. Moreau, who insisted more than 100 years earlier that "the mind will not be cultivated at the expense of



**T**he two youngest Holy Cross rectors are Frs. Tom Eckert, C.S.C., ordained in 2003 (left) and Dan Parrish, C.S.C., just ordained in April 2004 (right), who are also neighbors in St. Ed's and Zahm, respectively. Both are entering their second year in the position. Fr. Dan offers these few thoughts. "Fr. Hesburgh always says that a rector has the best job on campus and the most influence over students' lives. Our students are incredible people, and it is an honor to minister to them at such an important time in their lives. Whatever happens with a student, chances are his rector is involved in supporting or ministering to him in some way." Fr. Tom

adds, "Serving as an RA my senior year in Stanford really allowed me to get a glimpse of what residence hall ministry means and the effect a good rector can have on his students. I'm not surprised that Notre Dame RAs constitute the largest single category of candidates entering Moreau Seminary. Since then, I've also learned that Holy Cross' influence extends far beyond Notre Dame. I have had the privilege to do Hispanic ministry in Chile and Arizona. Still, it's hard to know whether I would be here today were it not for the way I experienced community, brotherhood, and faith because of Holy Cross' commitment to student life at Notre Dame."

the heart. While we prepare useful citizens for society, we shall likewise do our utmost to prepare citizens for eternal life.”

Holy Cross has often been described as a family-like community, one that welcomes colleagues, guests, and strangers into its houses with what one writer once termed an “atmosphere of relaxed spontaneity,” somewhat reminiscent of a sprawling, competitive Irish-American household. If we speak freely of a “Notre Dame Family” today, it is largely because creating that ethos has been the family business of Holy Cross religious assigned to this sliver of Northern Indiana for the last 162 years.

And despite the invariable student complaints about rules being overly strict and administrator laments about the “tendency to imbibe” ever since John Tyler squatted precariously in the White House, the emphasis throughout Notre Dame’s history has consistently been on holding students to high standards of conduct while readily granting pardon to the truly contrite. If rectors are a somewhat “independent and testy lot,” as one 1970s assistant vice president claimed, it is often in defense of students whom they think, rightly or wrongly, deserve a break from other campus authorities holding them to the fine print of the latest, and much expanded, edition of the rulebook.

Fr. Sorin’s catalogues had many rules that have disappeared from print, like the ones that forbade students from blowing noses with their hands or running to the privy, urgent need or January icicles not-

withstanding. Theoretically, a 19<sup>th</sup> century student could be expelled for leaving campus without permission, yet in practice Sorin was notoriously lenient in disciplinary matters and often had to be coaxed by other administrators and professors into taking decisive action.

In one famous case, the founder refused to expel a student who had threatened a professor on four separate occasions and finally relented only after young Mr. William Ord connected solidly with the prof’s jaw while in an inebriated state. He insisted that corporal punishment not be used on the grade-school-aged “minims” at a time when it was standard practice and instructed teachers and prefects to “lead [students] by affection rather than fear, not to be too severe, and never to exasperate them.”

Fr. Sorin genuinely liked students and, in making it a point to know them personally, he set a lasting standard for Holy Cross religious, professors, and staff at Notre Dame. He was at heart a pushover, and despite a fair amount of trafficking in war stories when rectors gather together these days, most of them are too.

Some students never quite grasp how entertaining rectors find them even when they are misbehaving while others catch the glint in the eye accompanying a stern admonition. Sometimes propriety demands that one keep a straight face with a student only to laugh uproariously when sharing the story with other rectors or fellow colleagues—not to deny that a rector will occasionally go nuclear over a particularly egregious violation.

Rector tales are as common at Notre Dame as student foibles. They mysteriously combine with the goofy welcome signs, poignant moments, lifelong friendships, Grotto candles, mundane maintenance tasks, overflowing Sunday night hall Masses, and goosebumpy myths swirling around the Dome to weave a story that reveals something essential about the place for those who know it most intimately.

Notre Dame was raised from the marl by a pioneering community of men who dedicated themselves to sharing their students’ lives along every step of the way so long as two beige bricks remained stacked together. Likewise, it is successive generations of C.S.C.s, committed to carrying on that tradition, who have been the mortar binding generations of hearts to this place long after students have graduated and moved on to more upscale housing.

It’s just what we do. It is enough for us that we know our purpose is to live here for them. We revel in the knowledge that while our students occasionally defy our regulations, they regularly exceed our expectations and leave here having transcended some of their limitations, growing in mind and heart on their way to becoming something better than they might otherwise have been.

Lastly, we pray for them, more than they know, seeking the intercession of the Lady on the Dome who has guided this great work from the start and in whose hands it is entrusted until its completion. These, our students, are the very finest signs that the years of labor begun by a priest, seven brothers, and a shaggy ox one glistening November morning long ago have borne lasting fruit, and their return each August gives purpose to our lives no less than theirs.



## Mission and Education

"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. And, as in every work of our mission, we find that we ourselves stand to learn much from those whom we are called to teach."

*Constitutions of the Congregation of Holy Cross 2.16*

## CONGREGATION OF HOLY CROSS

ANSWER  
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