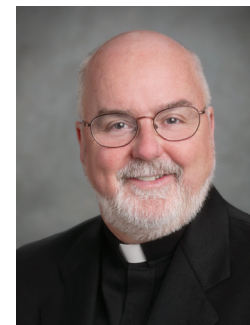


to Holy Cross. And so when I was asked to return to Dhaka as the first commencement speaker at the new University, I was honored and privately struck by the personal significance for me. The ceremony itself was beautiful, attended by the papal nuncio, by Cardinal Patrick D’Rozario, C.S.C., Cardinal of the Archdiocese of Dhaka, and the Minister of Education for Bangladesh (who was educated by Holy Cross Sisters at Holy Cross College in Dhaka). Over 500 graduates received diplomas and were surrounded by beaming families and friends. The University building is presently a very modest and small structure on the grounds where Notre Dame College is located but there are plans and hopes for a substantial University edifice and the necessary fund raising is underway. However modest the building is, the spirit was electric, full of hope for the students and full of hope for the future of the University. It is unmistakably a Holy Cross institution for over the archway leading to the University are the words “competence to see and courage to act.” These words, from the Constitutions of Holy Cross, are used universally at Holy Cross educational institutions across the world challenging Holy Cross members and students alike not just to develop competencies to see but the courage to act on what we see.

Not knowing that those words were over the archway, I used that quote as part of my already prepared address. What I tried to do in my commencement talk was to give some advice to these young university graduates who were roughly my age when I lived in their country over 40 years ago. Perhaps I was trying to help them find focus in a way in which I found focus in their country those many years ago. It was in their country that I began to see and developed the resolve to act. It was in their country that I was so inspired by seeing Holy Cross priests, brothers and sisters live the mission that it gave me the courage to act. That commencement day was indeed a day of celebration for the students, the families and those who continue to build the university. I reveled in their excitement but at the same time I drew deep satisfaction in having come full circle in my own life: returning to a land where over 40 years ago I strengthened my commitment to Holy Cross, moving beyond obsessive doubting. It was there I remembered the lesson that God is always with us, leading us in ways we sometimes cannot imagine but always there, giving us the courage to move on. I have subsequently learned that lesson over and over again in life. And now I had learned it once again for I had come full circle and It was so good to be back in Dhaka!

Rev. Thomas J. O’Hara, C.S.C., is currently on staff at King’s College where he works with student athletes to support their academic success. Prior to this, he served as Provincial Superior of the Congregation of Holy Cross, United States Province. Fr. O’Hara also served as the eighth President of King’s College (Wilkes-Barre, Pa.) He is a native of Hazleton, Pa., and a 1971 King’s alumnus. He was ordained a priest in 1978.



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MONTHLY REFLECTION SERIES

Coming Full Circle

Rev. Thomas O’Hara, C.S.C.

I write this reflection as I travel back to the United States from Dhaka, Bangladesh. I came to Dhaka to serve as commencement speaker for the newest Holy Cross University, Notre Dame University Bangladesh. It was their very first commencement and I was honored to be invited to speak. For me, it was a story of coming full circle in my life in Holy Cross.

When I was a seminarian in 1975, I spent the better part of a year in Dhaka. Bangladesh was a newly independent country, having fought a war of independence from Pakistan in 1971. Holy Cross has been in Bengal since the 1850's, almost as long as it has been at the University of Notre Dame in Indiana. While there, I taught English at Notre Dame College (the equivalent to a Junior College for us) in Dhaka, which was then and still is now, a preeminent College in Bangladesh. I also worked with Mother Teresa's Sisters at their home for the destitute and dying. Both experiences changed my life forever because a few years earlier, as a young seminarian, I had left Holy Cross not so sure of my future. On some days, I found myself obsessed with self-reflection and doubt. But the experience of living with the Holy Cross community while teaching young students English and encountering the destitute and dying on the streets of Dhaka pulled me out of self-absorption

and exposed me to a reality that was challenging, profound, and at times difficult, but ultimately full of meaning and even peace. Bangladesh was so very precarious at the time, called the "breadbasket of the world" because it was such a poor country in need of significant foreign relief. But I was inspired by the Holy Cross community there and in the darkness of the situation around me I found purpose and meaning. God had called me to Dhaka for that short time and soon it became clear to me in Bangladesh that Holy Cross was to be my life.

“ ... competence to see, courage to act. ”

And because of the diversity of Holy Cross ministerial options, what a life it has been. I am humbled by the privileges I have had serving as a Holy Cross Religious, a priest of the Congregation of Holy Cross. After Bangladesh I soon found myself as seminarian, then deacon, then priest in a Holy Cross parish in a very poor section of Brooklyn, NY, an experience that also shaped me, and to this day has a profound effect on me. After five years, my provincial asked me

to pursue doctoral studies and I did so, getting my Ph.D. in Political Science at the American University in Washington, DC. Then I had the privilege of returning to my alma mater, King's College, to teach Political Science and fell in love with teaching and working with college students. While at King's, I took a two year leave to work with Holy Cross priests, brothers and sisters in Uganda. I taught social science at the Philosophical Center in Jinja, Uganda and on weekends celebrated Mass in the local villages. Those two years in Uganda created for me some of the most beautiful and profound years of my life. Full of new insights about life in Africa, I returned to King's to teach by sharing my experiences and challenging my students to think globally and think beyond their own immediate concerns. After 11 years in the classroom, I was appointed as President of King's College, a position I held for 12 years. Those were rewarding years, years full of challenges and opportunities to move my alma mater forward. During those years I was also able to initiate some programs between King's College and Notre Dame College in Dhaka. After finishing my term as president, I spent some time on sabbatical and found myself back in Dhaka where I participated in conversations with members of the Holy Cross community there about how best to establish a Holy Cross University in Bangladesh. After

returning from sabbatical I was elected Provincial Superior of the United States Province of Priests and Brothers of the Congregation of Holy Cross. It stands as one of the deepest privileges of my life to serve as Provincial of this great band of men and to travel throughout the Province to encounter so many amazing parts of our mission, a mission carried out by dedicated Holy Cross Religious and committed lay people who join us in the mission or otherwise make the mission possible. To this day I am humbled by that privilege. And then full circle: I returned to my alma mater where I work with students who have academic struggles, helping them to meet the challenges, both academic and personal, of college life.



God has blessed me deeply by allowing me to serve the people of God as a Holy Cross Religious, a Holy Cross priest. I remain convinced it was the 1970's experience in Bangladesh that cemented my resolve to commit myself