



Liz Hayden, Congregation of Holy Cross Benefactor

# The Making of Me on the Road to Emmaus

BY LIZ HAYDEN

I came to discover the amazing work of the Congregation of Holy Cross when I entered Stonehill College, a small liberal arts institution founded in 1948 by the Congregation. In the fall of 1972, the admissions leaflet pronounced: “Stonehill - the Making of a Person.” I was intrigued. Forty years later, I can now attest that I had no clue as to the enormous impact the Congregation of Holy Cross would have in the “Making of Me.”

Stonehill is where I met my husband, Jim, as freshmen. It is here our values were cultivated

to grow in the image of God. One of many fond memories is Sunday Mass with Fr. Jack McCarthy, C.S.C. The Chapel, now situated on the center of the main campus, was nonexistent in the school’s early days. Mass was said in the basement of the main academic building. Picture, if you will, a low basement ceiling, no natural light, folding chairs, a moveable Eucharistic table. As unattractive as the space was, I loved it! The space cultivated a deep sense of unity, as we were all able to encircle Fr. Jack around the Eucharistic table. Five years later Fr. Jack married us. And again, he was there

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to walk with me when I lost my husband at the age of 47. Fr. Jack was an exemplar of the finest in the “great band of men” who serve students on the Congregation’s campuses.

My daughter, Elizabeth, was a sophomore at Stonehill on September 11, 2001, when my husband, Jim, died. My son, John, was a high school senior. Jim was on the second plane flown into the World Trade Center. My family was devastated. Before I had even begun to understand all that had happened, the Holy Cross-Stonehill community was there by my side. The community assessed our needs and offered support of all kinds. The most important aspect to me was knowing that my family and I were not alone, that we would be supported through the trials of an unknown future.

During the months and years after Jim’s death, I was constantly drawn back to the abstract readings, discussions, and papers of my philosophy and religious study classes. The “biggie” questions: What gives our life meaning? How do individuals cope under extreme circumstances beyond their control? Why is there suffering in the world? Where is God? I had a framework based in the tradition of Holy Cross through my classes and professors at Stonehill and this provided me support during a critical period of my life’s reconstruction.

Where was God? God was at my family’s side. Individuals at the Stonehill community and beyond reached out and embraced us in our sorrow and grief along our road to Emmaus.

I found great healing and purpose in setting goals to create a more just and compassionate society. Two years after 9-11, I left my highly coveted teaching position in one of Massachusetts’ highest performing school districts and moved to Boston to volunteer full time at an inner-city middle school. I became active in assisting immigrant students to finish high school and to find pathways to continue their education. Through

my parish I traveled to Jamaica to support a sister parish to work with their elementary school. Each of these endeavors deepened my faith and hope.

In 2011, I had the opportunity to travel to Lima, Peru to visit Canto Grande, the Holy Cross parish mission. Fr. David Farrell, C.S.C., enthusiastically hosted our small group and relayed the history of Canto Grande. Four hundred squatters who had fled the countryside to escape terrorists had been relocated from the central square in Lima to the outskirt wastelands of the city. The Parish now consists of 250,000 members. Through the incredible efforts of Holy Cross, this community has survived under the most inhospitable of conditions. One of Fr. David’s dreams is to provide a pavilion to allow the community to congregate for Masses, graduations, and other community events while providing protection from the harsh desert conditions. I, along with other faithful Holy Cross supporters, are working together to make this dream a reality. As St. Francis stated, “It is in giving that we receive.”

The Congregation of Holy Cross introduced me to the core questions of human existence, the meaning and purpose of life, and provided mentors and role models of the highest caliber. I cannot imagine what life would have been like without the Congregation’s imprint during my college years and their continual support throughout my life. The Congregation’s commitment to educate the heart and the mind, to lead lives of justice and compassion, and to show love and mercy to one another makes us authentic followers of Christ.

Thank you, Congregation of the Holy Cross, for the opportunity to realize who I will become as I journey on the road to Emmaus. ✠



Pictured, from left to right: Fr. Bob Wiseman, C.S.C., Liz Hayden, Chari Infante, and Joe Chavara, a friend of Fr. Wiseman and Rotarian whose club in Winter Park, Florida, has completed a number of water purification projects at Colegio Fe y Alegria, a Holy Cross school in the District of Peru.