“Try to keep your soul always in peace and quiet, always ready for whatever our Lord may wish to work in you.”

— St. Ignatius Loyola
The Need

We live in a time of relentless change. We sense this in the very marrow of our lives. As our world transforms itself rapidly and radically, we cannot help but feel the barrage of effects. Our technology evolves at an ever-expanding rate. Our social and political touchstones appear to alter, often violently, week to week. We are overloaded with information, even as the truths and values that we once thought timeless are questioned, critiqued, and redefined.

It is both a fascinating and a challenging time to come of age.

At Holy Cross, we believe that what our Jesuit tradition has to offer is needed by our students and our world more than ever before. Over the course of our 170-year history, we have constructed a holistic approach to educating the whole person based on the Ignatian vision. This has been, and continues to be, the basis of our mission and our success. We are the only top-tier, strictly undergraduate liberal arts college in the nation infused with Catholic and Jesuit ideals.

We understand our mission. We understand how that mission will be accomplished. And we understand—and insist—that this mission is vital to the future of our students and the world they will inherit.

From the beginning, at the core of the Holy Cross experience has been the Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius Loyola. Today the Spiritual Exercises are more popular than ever with our students. No other college or university in the United States has the overwhelming student interest in the Exercises that Holy Cross enjoys.

College of the Holy Cross Contemplative Center

We believe that what our Jesuit tradition has to offer is needed by the entire College community, students and faculty, alumni and parents, staff and administrators.
The students who participate in our retreats articulate beautifully the profound importance these spiritual experiences have played in the development of the inner life. In today’s wired culture, in which students are always “plugged-in,” and a chronic, general busyness defines daily life, the Spiritual Exercises and other retreats offer an alternative way of thinking and living.

If you have ever participated in a contemplative retreat, you know that it is often a life-changing opportunity for silence, reflection, and prayer. It is rare and peaceful time for engaging with one’s own self and with God. On retreat, we ponder the most important questions with which a person can wrestle, discerning who we are called to be, and what we are called to do.

Today, Holy Cross is calling not only its students, but also its faculty, its administration, its alumni and its friends—our entire community—to become more. In order to become more, we require the resources that will allow us to accomplish the crucial work of transformation and development. One of our primary and most immediate needs is our own Contemplative Center.

“Attending the Spiritual Exercises showed me how present God’s voice is in the silence. I left the retreat with a newfound relationship with God, my spirituality, and a new understanding of what it means to find God in all things. The Spiritual Exercises have been the most impactful in my daily life—even months after the experience. Not only do you have the chance to learn what it means to be a part of a Jesuit community, you also are able to take a step back, look at who you are, who you want to become, and who you would like to be for others.” — Vanessa Moscatello ‘15
The Answer

We believe that the creation of our own sacred space devoted to the Spiritual Exercises is essential to our mission. In the past, the College has utilized facilities that, today, are either unsuited to our purposes or no longer available to us. The time has come for Holy Cross to invest in its own Contemplative Center. To build a permanent home for our retreat programs, a place where the pace of life can be slowed in order to allow for the true depths of contemplation that can bring self-knowledge and wisdom. The Contemplative Center will be a place dedicated to the use of the entire College community, students and faculty, alumni and parents, staff and administration. A place where one can step away from the stress of our daily lives and the pressures of all that is required of us, and awake from the nearly hypnotizing routine of day-to-day living. It is time for Holy Cross to create a sacred space where all members of our community can regroup in the natural world. Where all can bask in the depth of God’s love, and be renewed by the beauty of God’s creation.

The Center

Toward this end, the College has purchased a 52-acre parcel of land in West Boylston, Mass., less than 20 minutes from campus. This site provides all the features for which we have searched in envisioning our Contemplative Center.

Situated in a beautiful, cloister-like setting, the Center will be constructed within the Wachusett Reservoir watershed and will overlook the reservoir. The main building will include a chapel, meeting spaces, and a dining room. Adjoining the main building will be living quarters, containing 25 double bedrooms and 25 single bedrooms. We have made every effort to craft a final design that will enhance every aspect of the retreat experience, with space appropriate for both solitary introspection and prayer, and group discussion and interaction.
Q: Why is a Contemplative Center a primary need for Holy Cross today?

A: We have long been in need of a nearby, College-owned retreat center. The facilities we have used in the past either have closed down or are outmoded. Having a Center that is removed from campus but accessible nearby, set in a place of natural beauty, will give us the opportunity to make this signature Holy Cross experience available to all in our community: students, faculty and staff, alumni and parents, as never before. But what may be most significant is the fact that, as national statistics tell us that young participation in faith communities is decreasing, our students’ participation in retreats and contemplative opportunities is growing. This speaks to our unique tradition. And it has helped to define and focus our goals for our future.

Q: Why the site in West Boylston?

A: It fits all of our many requirements. It is nearby—only 20 minutes from campus. It is beautiful, tranquil and serene—the Center will overlook a pristine reservoir. And it is the right size and cost for our proposed vision of the Center.

Q: How do you envision the Contemplative Center fitting in with the overall mission of the College?

A: Our approach to the educational experience is based on the Jesuit vision of developing the entire individual—body, mind and soul. I think we are all profoundly aware of the effect of the technological changes of the last several decades. The new Contemplative Center will be a sanctuary for Holy Cross, a sacred place for renewal—both individually and as a community. We might think of the Center as a fine metaphor for the work we do on the Hill, instilling the continuous growth of the interior life and that growth’s attendant self-knowledge.
Organized around a central “cloister-like” outdoor space, the Contemplative Center will include all features necessary to support overnight and day-long retreats. Major group spaces such as the dining room, main meeting room and chapel capitalize on the exceptional 25-mile view to the east overlooking the Wachusett Reservoir 500 feet below. The Chapel and other major group spaces are designed to accommodate up to 70 participants. Connected to the main building, the Lodge contains 12 double bedrooms and 36 single bedrooms for a total capacity of 60 beds. The primary design objective is to produce a building which strongly supports the College’s retreat programs within a structure that allows the natural landscape to enhance the retreat experience.
“My experience with the Spiritual Exercises was life-altering. That first day of the retreat, I was disconnected and scared to address my faith—but I left the retreat center with a sense of peace, hope, and trust that everything was okay. I felt as if a thousand-ton weight was lifted off my chest, and I could finally grow into the person God planned for me to become. The Spiritual Exercises gives you a chance to put aside earthly worries and focus on your personal spiritual journey.” — Sean Pacheco ’17

The Call

We believe the retreat experience is one of the most important components of the overall Holy Cross experience. We believe the retreat experience is one of the primary aspects of Holy Cross life that sets us apart. We are convinced that the opportunity for calm, focused, deep introspection and prayer is more essential than ever before in the history of our community if we are to produce men and women of vision, service, self-knowledge and ethical depth.

Generations of Holy Cross students testify to the fact that a retreat was one of the most shaping and memorable experiences of their student years. The current generation on the Hill has expressed a steady and ever-growing desire for precisely the kind of meditative encounter that a retreat can provide.

Now is the time to make manifest the future of the Holy Cross vision by building the next chapter of our history—a history rich in the values of contemplation, prayer, discernment, and the interior life of the soul.

What could possibly be more important than these values?

We invite you to join us in building the Contemplative Center, where future generations of our students will learn who they are, what they have to offer, and how they will live out the Holy Cross ethos in this complex and ever-changing world.

The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius help us to see that all the things in this world are gifts of God, created for us, to be the means by which we can come to know him better, love him more surely, and serve him more faithfully.