

HOLY CROSS STUDENT SEES WORLD IN NEW WAY AFTER PROGRAM IN SOUTH AFRICA

ARTICLE BY BRONWEN DACHS, CATHOLIC NEWS SERVICE, JULY 30, 2012. PHOTO COURTESY OF MARY CONLEY.

CAPE TOWN, South Africa (CNS) — College of the Holy Cross student Mark Legare didn't expect it, but a two-week leadership program he recently completed in South Africa got him thinking differently about the world.

Legare now holds a wider view, he said, one that recognizes that people around the world have a lot to share with people in developed countries such as the United States.

"We gained a different perspective on how we live, not just on how others live," Legare said in a July 27 telephone interview from Worcester, Mass., the home of Holy Cross.

He admitted that he shared the common American perception that "people in the U.S. have better lives than those living elsewhere." After the July 8-20 program at the University of the Free State in Bloemfontein, South Africa, which focused on leadership, diversity and racial reconciliation in higher education, Legare said, "I know that we have global struggles and I think I see these more clearly."Legare was among nine students and staff members from the school who took part in "Transcending Boundaries in Global Change Leadership." The program drew 220 students and academic leaders from universities in the U.S., Belgium, Netherlands and Japan.

The students were between the ages of 19 and 22, "and because we were all the same age we had certain similarities, despite interesting differences, in our reactions to and understanding of global events, such as the popular uprisings in Egypt last year, 9/11 and the war in Iraq," Legare said.

"We talked a lot about these perspectives, as well as about the importance of being bold and courageous," he added, noting that all participants had "a passionate engagement with and investment in research and learning."

In an address to participants, Jonathan Jansen, vice chancellor at University of the Free State, challenged students to examine what it means to be a "transformational leader in a wounded country and troubled world."

Jansen took his position in 2009, a year after white students produced a video of a mock initiation of five black staff members at a university residence that shocked the world and led to student protests in South Africa.

He is the first black vice chancellor at the university, which was founded during apartheid and taught only white students, in Afrikaans, until it was desegregated in the 1990s. Jansen has launched initiatives to foster racial reconciliation including curriculum reform, student leadership programs and a drive to promote black academics.

Legare said one of the highlights of his time in Bloemfontein was a conversation he and his friend Mendoza, from the Bronx, N.Y., had with Jansen about their interests and concerns.

"We didn't realize what a big name he has become in South Africa and so we were able to have a long, relaxed chat," he said.

Retired Anglican Archbishop Desmond Tutu spoke to the students during the program. Legare said the archbishop "inspired us with his wisdom and humor." The stories the archbishop shared about life as a black person during apartheid, he said, "could have led to him speaking with great anger or sadness."

Other Holy Cross participants were students Roobvia Bernadin, Patricia Feraud, Yulissa Nunez and Manny Mendoza, Jacqueline Peterson, dean of students; Mary Conley, associate professor of history; Mable Millner, director of multicultural education; and Virginia Coakley, assistant chaplain.

Holy Cross was one of nine U.S. colleges where University of the Free State students were placed in 2010 as part of the Study Abroad Leaders for Change initiative. Another group of South African students visited Holy Cross