

4th Sunday in Lent - March 29 & 30, 2014
All Saints Church, Syr., NY

Jim Krisher, Director
All Saints Church, Syr., NY

The Spiritual Renewal Center Comes to
The Bishop Harrison Center

I'm so happy to be able to talk with you this morning, and to introduce myself and the ministry that has been my life work - a ministry that will soon be your neighbor in the Harrison Center next door.

For the past 35 years, it has been my privilege to serve as Director of the Spiritual Renewal Center. In response to a strong sense of call from God, and with the help of a wonderful little group of friends and supporters, I first opened the Center in September of 1978 in a small space over Rothschilds Drugstore on E. Genesee St., across from Hutchings and Syracuse Stage. The purpose of our ministry has been from those earliest days to help men and women grow in their relationship with God. We started out by offering scripture classes, spirituality talks, and personal spiritual direction for both individuals and groups.

Five years later we moved to a larger space on James St. in Eastwood, where we would stay for the next seven years. During that time we continued to grow, we added more trained spiritual directors to our staff to meet many requests we were receiving, and significantly increased our offerings in Christian spirituality and scripture.

Then in 1990 we moved to still larger space on Court St. – the second floor of a building owned by the Syracuse Franciscans. These have been very fruitful years. We now have 21 spiritual directors on our staff, and in collaboration with John Rose, now pastor at St. Vincent's church, we started a training program for spiritual directors that has attracted participants from all over New York state, as well as from Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and Ontario. We began offering the Spiritual Exercises – an in-the-home retreat experience developed by St. Ignatius of Loyola, founder of Jesuits. We began a prison ministry, offering bible study and meditation and spirituality teachings at several state prisons here in central New York.

And now, in a little over a month, we'll be setting out on the next phase of our story when we move into 1342 Lancaster Ave. I can't tell you how pleased I am that this is happening, and I have no doubt that this new relationship between the Spiritual Renewal Center and All Saints parish is providential. I have a strong sense that this parish and the Spiritual Renewal Center are kindred spirits in our approach to living our discipleship, and I'm convinced that this will prove to be a really good fit for both of us.

I am so grateful for the warm welcome we have received from your Pastor Fred and your parish leadership, and the various parishioners I've already been able to meet and talk with. I am so grateful for the new home that you are creating for us here on your parish property. Your hospitality is a great, great blessing to us.

And I hope and trust that having the Spiritual Renewal Center here will be a great blessing for you as well.

For one thing, the Center is home to an incredible lending library of over 10,000 books on Christian spirituality and scripture and personal growth. I'd be surprised if there is another spiritual library like ours that is open to the public anywhere else in all of New York state and beyond – I certainly have never heard of any. And we intend to make sure this library is open and available to you on weekends after mass in addition to our normal weekday hours, so you'll have ready access to this remarkable resource.

I hope the convenience of our location here will make it easy for you to connect with a spiritual director should you feel so led, or take a scripture class, or attend a presentation or series of lectures on Christian mysticism, or contemplation and prayer. Perhaps you'll choose to participate in day or evening retreat, or join our meditation group, or pray through the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius. Perhaps you'll just enjoy coming to relax in comfortable lounge area with a cup of coffee or tea, to get in some quiet reading or reflection time. Perhaps you'll choose to become one of our dedicated group of volunteers who do receptionist and volunteer work

Now I'm well aware that I may be biased, but I think you'll find that the people you'll meet at the Spiritual Renewal Center are among most delightful and authentic individuals you can know. People from all walks of life and from a variety of denominational backgrounds participate at Center.

This ecumenical character of our work is I think one of our greatest strengths, as I'm convinced that God is doing something new in our time, and that includes breaking down the barriers that once divided Christians from one another. Such a rich grace it has been for me personally to minister to and minister side-by-side with Episcopalians and Baptists and Methodists and Lutherans and Presbyterians and so on.

We've also always been a safe place for people who come from no faith background, or who have been alienated from church, or who are trying to find meaning for their lives, and a connection with God.

Now in addition to our big move to Lancaster Ave., we're also currently in the process of upgrading our entire approach to communications. We'll soon have a completely revamped and dynamic web site, a newly re-designed newsletter, and an enhanced email and social media presence. I hope you'll make use of these avenues to stay informed about all that the Spiritual Renewal Center will be offering.

I do suspect it will take us some time to get fully up and running in our new location, but we're already putting together an outstanding lineup of speakers and presentations for the fall, in addition to all our ongoing ministries and services. We're looking forward to what I hope will be many many years of friendship and collaboration with All Saints parish.

On a final, more personal note – our move next door has a special significance for me as it was in St. Therese school that I taught my first religious education class while I was still an undergrad at SU, and it was right here, in what was then St. Therese Church, that my wife and I were married 32 years ago. So I guess you might say that for me, this move is like coming home again, and I thank God, and I thank you.