



Vol. XXI, No. 1
Spring 2018

Changing Times

by Brian O'Neel

This year Saint Luke Institute celebrates its 40th anniversary. When one considers all that has changed since we first opened our doors, it is *remarkable*.

Founded in 1977, Saint Luke began as a small outpatient alcohol treatment center for clergy and religious. Today it is a full-service facility that works hard to stay on the cutting edge of compassionate care.

Looking back, one thing is clear: Programs may change, but the need for a Christ-centered healing ministry, a staff committed to that ministry, and a willingness to adapt do not.

The most dramatic change at Saint Luke, however, was the shift from a strict focus on addiction recovery to a clinical, psychiatric model.

A Brief History

Four years after our founding, we established a residential program in Suitland, Maryland, a Washington, DC, suburb, where the Institute occupied a building that had formerly housed an aspirancy program for the Bernardine Franciscan Sisters.

By the mid-1990s, the shift to a broad-based, psychiatric approach and the addition of a number of psychologists—who had doctoral degrees and more in-depth training—was complete.

Saint Luke Institute also had grown to the point where a new, larger building was needed and found, this time in Silver Spring, Maryland, at the former seminary for the Missionary Servants of the Most Holy Trinity.

New Issues, New Approach

The most dramatic change at Saint Luke, however, was the shift from a strict focus on addiction recovery to a clinical, psychiatric model encompassing many mental health problems, notes longtime Coordinator of Neuropsychological Services, Dr. Gary Thompson.

Dr. Carol Farthing, who joined the staff in 1989, says, “Alcoholics often had sexual or personality issues in addition to the addiction. With this growing awareness, by the mid-1980s, Saint Luke Institute began treating broader issues.”

This grew out of Institute clinicians’ experience that when someone has an addiction, there always is some underlying problem. And so there developed an appreciation

amongst the clinical staff of just how important it was to treat these in order to bring integral healing.

At the same time clinicians had identified the need to address depression and trauma history along with addiction, the Catholic Church in the United States faced a wave of reported clergy sex abuse. The Institute began to minister to these individuals, though, as Dr. Farthing notes, “That was even then a small portion of what we treated.”

The 1990s saw the advent of another major change: The creation of Talitha-Life, a program specifically for women religious. Saint Luke had always served women, but this was the first permanent program designed for and by them.

“Talitha-Life was very group-oriented and community-oriented,” says Dr. Sheila Harron, who arrived at Saint Luke in 1995.

Women have remained an important part of our ministry. Today approximately a third of our residential clients are women religious.

Saint Luke Institute is the only major treatment center for clergy and religious to offer a five-year Continuing Care program. This comprehensive program assigns a continuing care therapist to the client who helps them transition back

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into every day life over the next five years. It also helps them develop a local support team, facilitates a re-entry workshop, and provides periodic “touch-base” workshops at the Institute.

Why a five-year program when others are only one?

Coordinator of Continuing Care Fr. Ken Phillips, TOR, says people who can maintain their recovery “for five years” have a better chance of maintaining their mental health “for the long term.”

In short, “We have adapted for the needs of the Church,” observes therapist Steve Kopp, who has served on staff since 1984. “As new components were found to work and help clients, they were incorporated into the program.”

Whole Person

“Saint Luke was ahead of the curve,” says physical therapist Dana Dowd, in explaining why she has remained on staff over 30 years.

“We were integrating physical, psychological, and spiritual wellness long before there was an understanding in the mainstream of how important this is.”

Kopp observes that Saint Luke also incorporates art therapy, experiential therapy, nutritional counseling, integrative movement, plus medical care from a doctor, psychiatrist, and 24-hour nursing.

The Spiritual Life

Yet another hallmark of the Institute is its integration of spirituality into the psychological assistance people

receive since ultimately, “We are about the healing of souls,” contends Sr. Meg Parrish, CSJ, a member of the Spirituality team since 1996.

Indeed many who come to the Institute arrive feeling very distant from God. Their spiritual lives need rebuilding.

For this reason, the Spirituality team helps clients bring their suffering and crises to the Lord in prayer and confront doubts about His love for them.

“We are always encouraging the residents,” she says, “to see prayer as a relationship with the Lord. Our work is to help them grow in intimacy with God.”

Sr. Meg adds many people over the years have said “the Institute saves lives. And it saves souls, too.”

How Much Has Changed?

“In the past, there was a real taboo [in the Church] about the need for therapy. A lot of people today are engaging in it on an outpatient basis and are familiar with the idea. It is not as stigmatizing as in the past,” Fr. Phillips notes.

There also seems to be a shift in how people handle mental health situations.

Clinicians have also seen some shifts in the issues they handle. Take, for instance, the increased usage of online pornography and a greater willingness to address issues such as trauma and depression.

With regard to the latter, many people have never felt free to speak about these. So especially as they approach middle age, says Dr. Harron, they end up suffering.

Saint Luke Institute offers such individuals a safe place to begin to gently and carefully uncover what has been hidden and to experience healing.

Dr. Farthing notes how growing awareness about brain function and how trauma affects the brain has led to new therapies to treat trauma, such as EMDR (eye movement desensitization and reprocessing).

Another development, observes Dr. Farthing, is the increased proportion of younger priests coming for treatment. Many of these gentlemen exhibit a lack of emotional skills and an inability to manage stress. This can result in their having difficulty in parish assignments.

“People may have accepted things in the past that they do not now,” Farthing says. “If the priests haven’t dealt with their own issues, it can be very difficult for them in their first parish.”

As a result, the Institute launched an online seminary formation program called Foundations, which several dioceses now use.

Thankfully, Farthing observes, the need for healthier human formation has gained increased attention and prioritization from the Vatican, seminaries, bishops, and superiors.

New Challenges

Additionally the greying of the population has led to the Institute’s formation of a new Aging and Memory Evaluation (AME), another example of how Saint Luke Institute continues to develop and expand its services. AME uses a three-week

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Saint Luke President Recommissioned as Missionary of Mercy



VATICAN CITY—Pope Francis has recommissioned Saint Luke Institute President Fr. David Songy, O.F.M.Cap., as a Missionary of Mercy. His Holiness originally made Father and over 1,000 priests Missionaries for the Jubilee Year of Mercy. That charge was to have ended on November 20, 2016, however, at the Jubilee’s close.

But during an April 10 meeting that brought 550 of these clerics together at the Vatican, the Holy Father indefinitely extended the mandate.

In his remarks to them he said that, reflecting “on the great service you have rendered to the Church, and on how much good you have done and offered to so many believers with your preaching and

above all with the celebration of the sacrament of Reconciliation, I considered it appropriate to extend your term for a little longer. I have received many testimonies of conversions realized through your service. And you are witnesses to this.”

“This is an incredible honor for all us,” Fr. Songy said, “and a tremendous responsibility. The experiences Missionaries had during the Jubilee of Mercy were remarkable occasions of grace, so the opportunity to continue in this capacity for Christ and His Church is a true blessing.”

According to Archbishop Rino Fisichella, president of the Pontifical Council for Promoting the New Evangelization, Missionary priests were chosen on the basis of their

ability to preach well, especially on the theme of mercy. Another criteria was their ability to be “good confessors,” meaning they are able to express God’s love in a merciful way.

Fisichella also said Missionaries demonstrated “patience” and “an understanding of human fragility.”

According to the papal bull of indiction *Misericordiae Vultus*, Fr. Songy and his peers have “the authority to pardon even those sins reserved to the Holy See,” for example, profanation of the Eucharist.

Fr. Songy is one of roughly 100 American priests commissioned by the Pope. Other Americans include Fr. Roger Landry, who is a nationally known columnist and speaker, and Fr. John Paul Zeller, MFVA, who is often seen on EWTN.

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evaluation to assess whether someone is truly afflicted with dementia or if they are experiencing some other neurological, biological, or psychological issue (e.g., major depression), or some combination thereof.

Bright Future

In 2012, Saint Luke Institute launched SLIconnect, an education ministry designed to provide practical resources for clergy,

religious, and lay leaders worldwide. SLIconnect supports healthy spiritual and emotional development for Church leaders through online courses, in-person workshops, and print resources developed by our expert staff members.

Furthermore Saint Luke has expanded geographically. It now has centers in Louisville, St. Louis, and Manchester, England, an outpatient facility outside of Baltimore, and an adjunct ministry in South Africa.

“We are committed to doing

all we can to support a healthy Church,” says Saint Luke Institute President Fr. David Songy, O.F.M.Cap. “This means making our knowledge and experience accessible wherever it is needed and helping those who come to us in need of healing find a place where, as Donald Cardinal Wuerl once put it, you find ‘the mercy of God made real.’”

Upcoming events

On October 22, Saint Luke Institute will hold its Annual Benefit at the Apostolic Nunciature in Washington, DC.

Titled “A Night With the Nuncio Benefiting Saint Luke Institute,” we will honor the ordinary for the Diocese of Richmond Bishop Barry C. Knestout with the 2018 Saint Luke Award.

Donor information

If you would like to partner with us in our mission of providing expert, compassionate care to priests and religious, won't you please consider a tax deductible contribution to aid us in our efforts? A donation envelope is enclosed. May God richly bless you for your kindness and heroic generosity.

Songy, Cash Speak at Recent Conference

ST. MEINRAD, IND.—The second Conference on Human Formation took place April 15-17, 2018, at Saint Meinrad Abbey in St. Meinrad, Ind. Dr. Emily Cash, PsyD, who directs the Saint Luke Center in Louisville, Ky. and Saint Luke President Fr. David Songy, O.F.M.Cap, STD, PsyD, spoke at the biennial event, which Saint Luke Institute and Saint Meinrad cosponsored.

At the meeting, experts in hu-

man formation and intercultural competency discussed strategies for evaluating, forming, and acculturating international clergy and religious candidates for ministry in the US.



SAINT LUKE INSTITUTE

8901 New Hampshire Avenue • Silver Spring, Maryland 20903
301-445-7970 • info@slu.org • www.slu.org

LukeNotes is a quarterly publication of Saint Luke Institute. For address changes, please call 301-422-5405 or e-mail lukenotes@slu.org.