

FATHER ROBERT KRENIK

1988 - 1995

Father Bob served the Church as a member of the Missionary Servants of the Most Holy Trinity as a religious brother for approximately twenty years. Realizing the coming crisis of the declining number of priests, Fr. Bob left the brotherhood and was accepted by the Diocese of Richmond to study for the priesthood at the Catholic University of America in Washington, D.C. Father Bob served the Church of the Incarnation in Richmond as a Deacon. He was ordained to the priesthood by Bishop Walter F. Sullivan on May 25, 1984. He served at the parishes of Holy Cross Church in Lynchburg and St. Theresa in Farmville. After leaving St. Theresa Parish, he volunteered to serve at parishes in Marion, Abingdon, Lebanon, St. Paul, and Coeburn, Va. Father Bob retired in September 2005. He passed away on July 21, 2010.



Fr. Bob Krenik: long, hard road over for now

By Jean Denton

Special to the Catholic Virginian

During the last nine months Father Bob Krenik actually experienced what he'd been telling the faithful for years. "When you're suffering God is very close to you, because God suffers too."

Father Krenik, battling a particularly aggressive form of cancer, said that in the midst of an excruciating physical demise during chemotherapy and the accompanying emotional struggle he came to truly believe his own words for the first time.

"I'd said it in homilies many times, but now I really understood," he explained last week as he recalled his recent ordeal.

Now feeling fit and looking his old self, he said his cancer — acute myeloid leukemia (AML) — has been classified as in remission since May.

Father Krenik, 67, retired last month from active ministry as a result of his illness. He's served the Richmond Diocese since his ordination to the priesthood in 1984 after 20 years as a religious brother of the Missionary Servants of the Most Holy Trinity. For the last 18 years he's been pastor of parishes in the rural southwest region — most recently the Lebanon — St. Paul — Coeburn cluster. He hadn't planned to retire so soon, but his world changed suddenly with the shocking news he received by telephone on September 10, which he calls "the most traumatic day of my life."

It was shocking, he says because he felt fine. Other than mild fatigue and a brief fainting spell earlier in the week, he said he had no symptoms of illness.

But his nearly passing out while mowing his lawn one afternoon cause him enough alarm that he visited his doctor who suspected anemia, but sent him to a hematologist for further tests as a precaution. That was midweek.

Saturday the results came in. When Father Krenik returned late that evening from celebrating Mass at St. Mary's in Coeburn he got a phone message to call the doctor immediately.

"When I called he told me, 'I don't like to give this kind of news over the phone but you've got acute leukemia and you need to go to the hospital tonight.'"

Stunned, the priest persuaded the physician to allow him to preside at Mass at his other two churches the next day before going to the hospital.

In the morning he faced the difficult task of breaking the news to his parishioners while he was still in disbelief himself.

"I remember saying to the people in St. Paul that I sort of resented having the option of going to Charlottesville (to high-level care at the University of Virginia Medical Center) when many people here don't have that option. But afterward many people came up to me and said please do," Father Krenik said.

Later he was gratified to learn from his UVA oncologist Dr. Charles Hess — a native of Grundy — that the Charlottesville hospital has a special program to encourage and accommodate medical care for residents of far southwest Virginia.

In the rural part of the diocese where there's typically a familial bond between pastor and parishioners, news of his illness and its severity was as devastating to the people as it was to Father Krenik.

Even though he's a spiritual man who has been steeped in Christian faith his entire adult life, he still experienced the throes of emotion that assault most victims of serious disease.

After an initial reaction of disbelief and denial — since he seemed so healthy — Father Krenik said he went through guilt, anger and resignation in turn. He laughed as he recalled questioning whether God was punishing him for something.

"That Catholic guilt thing was there," he chuckled, "but then I knew this is just something in one's genetic makeup. It's part of life."

Chemotherapy, as it is for most cancer patients, was the most difficult part of the ordeal for Father Krenik.

"When I went into the hospital, I didn't feel sick, but I would have to become very sick in order to get well," he explained remembering the anger he felt during certain treatments that he described as "excruciatingly painful" and when the chemo began making him so ill.

He added that even though treatment was "hard to go through" he eventually agreed that it was needed because the cure rate of AML is only 30%. Major side effects for him were blindness in his left eye and needing to have his gallbladder removed. At first, he said, he was bothered by the "unfairness of it all"

since he made it a point of taking of himself physically, but ultimately he believed it was his overall good health that saved him.

The hardest part, he pointed out, was that the physical breakdown caused by the chemotherapy "just annihilates any sense of dignity — here I was, supposed to be a priest or whatever I am, and that just went out the window.

"And then there was the day I lost my hair," he recollected.

"That was my lowest point," he added softly.

With that behind him and feeling good again — and having a full head of hair once more — Father Krenik, always known to his people as a positive, gentle man, now concentrates on the present and his gratitude for those who supported and cared for him, prayed for him and visited him when he was so sick and struggling to stay alive.

Many people from the far southwest parishes made the 4-5 hour drive to Charlottesville to visit him during the month he was in the hospital for his initial "induction" chemotherapy. He noted that Bishop DiLorenzo visited him in the hospital and called several times as did diocesan Vicar General Msgr. Thomas Shreve and Vicar of the Clergy, Father Mark Lane. During Father Krenik's recuperation he was cared for by his longtime friends Don and Margaret Mullins and John and Nina White in their Abingdon homes. Both couples are Christ the King parishioners.

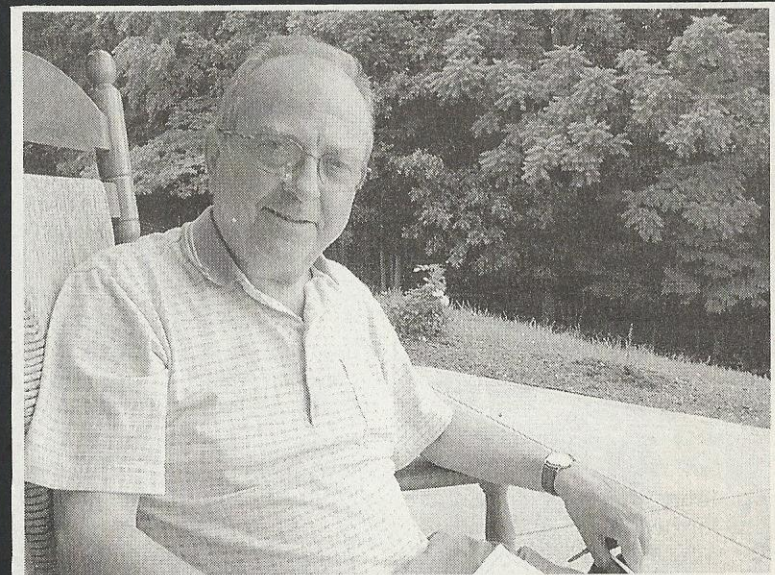
A Minnesota native who as a religious brother taught visually handicapped children in New Jersey and then fifth and sixth grade African-American students in rural Alabama, Father Krenik's experience as a priest for the Diocese of Richmond included brief stints in Charlottesville, Lynchburg, Hopewell and Farmville before going to the southwest where he was pastor of St. John's, Marion and Christ the King, Abingdon.

He admitted that when he first became ill, he adamantly did not want to retire, but now realizes it was the right decision, partly because "remission does not mean cure."

Meanwhile, he looks forward to serving as a "covering" priest for churches in the southwest regions when pastors take a vacation. He also hopes, eventually, to start a support group for cancer victims in the area. But he noted he'll follow the suggestion of his physician, "a very wise man who says make sure you are over this yourself," before making such a commitment.

"I'm sort of a support group junkie," he laughed, explaining that he's taken part in priest support groups for years.

"I like the dynamics, where you can get things off your chest with people who are understanding but who you are not necessarily with on a daily basis."



Father Bob Krenik now in remission.

Bishop Sullivan To Install Father Metzger

Bishop Walter F. Sullivan, of the Catholic Diocese of Richmond, will install Father Joseph H. Metzger III as pastor of Saint Theresa Catholic Church during the 5:30 p.m. Mass on Saturday, September 16, at the church on Buffalo Street in Farmville. Father Joe will serve as pastor of both Saint Theresa Catholic Church and the Catholic Church of the Nativity in Buckingham.

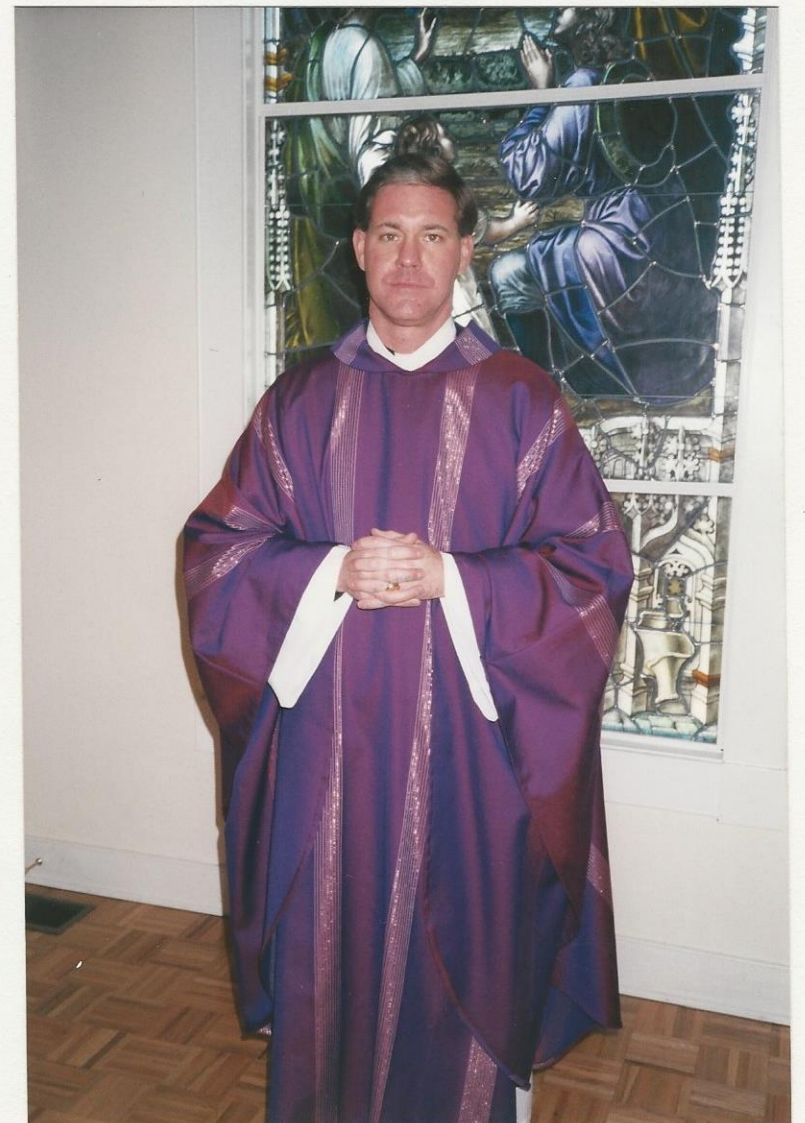
Father Joe is a 1984 graduate of Hampden-Sydney College with a bachelor of arts in political science. In 1988, he earned a B.A. in sacred theology from the Pontifical Gregorian University at Vatican City. He served a pastoral year at Saint Joseph Catholic Church in Petersburg from 1988-89. Father Joe was ordained a deacon at Saint Peter's Basilica in Vatican City on April 26, 1990. He received a Licentiate in Dogmatic Theology in 1991. He was ordained a priest

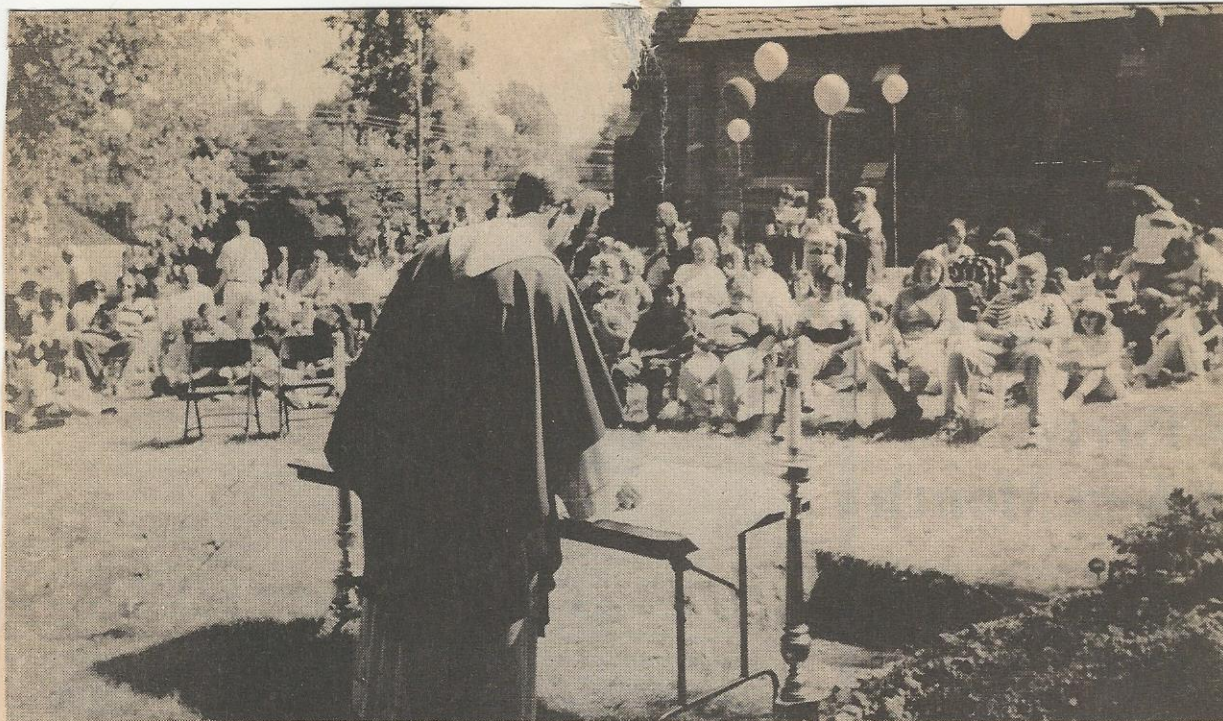
on August 17, 1991, at the Cathedral of the Sacred Heart in Richmond.

Prior to coming to Saint Theresa in Farmville for his first pastorate, Father Joe served as parochial vicar at Saint Andrew Catholic Church in Roanoke and Saint Pius X in Norfolk.



1995 - 1999





Saint Theresa parishioners share in the groundbreaking Mass on Sunday, Sept. 7. Father Joseph Metzger asked each family to share part of their "ground" to add to Saint

Theresa's at the celebratory Mass. Parishioners also enjoyed refreshments provided by the Knights and Ladies of Virginia after mass.

St. Theresa's Celebrates With Groundbreaking Mass

Saint Theresa Catholic Church celebrated its groundbreaking Mass on Sunday, September 7, at 10:30 a.m. on the site of the new church. Father Joseph H. Metzger III was celebrant. Special guests included Carole Kahwajy, Diocese of Richmond development; Bob Winthrop, architect; and Charles Metro, Jr., contractor.

The growing Saint Theresa parish community consists of 250 families. Due to this increase in the parish population,

a building committee was formed two years ago to study renovating or adding to the current church. A fundraising campaign for renovating the current church and constructing an addition to the existing structure was initiated in January. Because of the campaign's success and the generosity of many, construction begins on Monday, September 22. The last Mass in the current church is scheduled for Sunday, September 21. After this date, all Masses will be

celebrated in Saint Theresa's Parish Center.

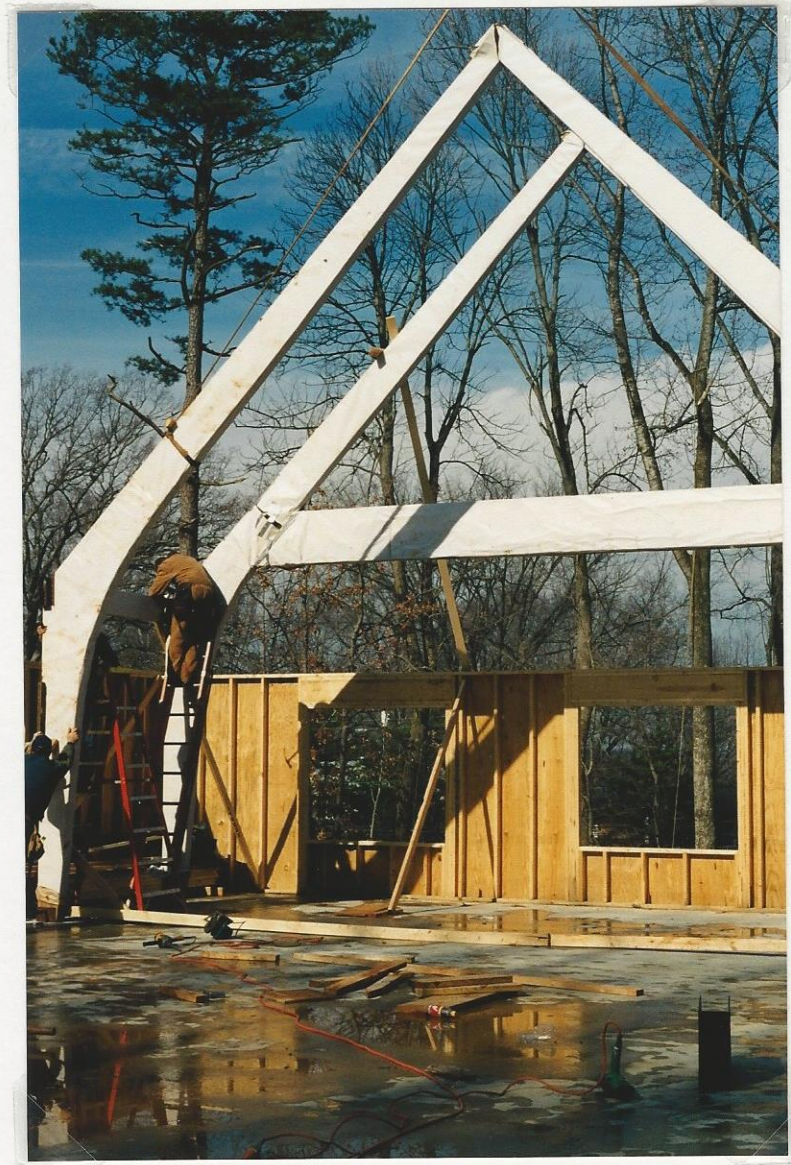
Saint Theresa's Parish Center is also home to Saint Theresa's Christian Formation classes. Over 100 students will begin these classes in the Parish Center at 9 a.m. on September 21.













June '98



27 Mar '98
from Buffalo St.

↑
new
entrance to
parking lot



27 Mar '98
Back/side of old/new church



Farmville parish making smooth shift to new, larger church

By STEVE NEILL

OF THE CATHOLIC VIRGINIAN

When the new church of St. Theresa's parish in Farmville is dedicated by Bishop Walter F. Sullivan (Saturday, June 13, at 5:30 p.m.), it will be three times as large as the old church which has been transformed into the Great Hall.

Unlike pastors who have had headaches and tension with parish building programs, Father Joseph Metzger, pastor, reports that the transition from the old church to the new one has been smooth. He knows where much of the credit belongs.

"We've had a wonderful building committee and we frequently had to meet twice a week," Father Metzger said. "One time I had to gather everybody on two hours notice on a weekday at noon and they all showed up.

"We have had unity throughout and no dissension, which is a tribute to the parishioners and the presence of the Holy Spirit," Father Metzger said.

The facade of the new church is of granite in keeping with the original church which it adjoins. The church sits on a hill overlooking Third Street, about half a mile from Farmville's downtown business district. The rear exterior wall, which is less visible, will be light gray drivet, a form of stucco. The original structure will retain its sloping slate roof and the new building will have a similar shape roof of glass fiber shingles which resemble slate.

Entrance into the Great Hall or commons — the original church built in 1951 — will be through a covered open porch with an arched copper roof.

Within the worship area is an octagon-shaped oak baptismal font handcrafted by Pete Aldi, a parishioner.

The church has a cathedral laminated beam ceiling with suspended incandescent pendant lights. On the two side walls are clear rose windows letting in natural light. St. Theresa's original stained glass windows have been retained and will be used in the

new church with long clear glass panels on either side of the stained glass window.

The church worship space is in a cruciform shape with three gables. It will seat 300 people in oak pews around the perimeter and in the body of the church. The rear walls facing the altar are the original granite walls of the old church. The other walls are painted in a pale color called natural silk with white trim and border.

The floors are a mixture of wood parquet flooring and teal green carpeting, with the hardwood floor covering the main aisle, the altar platform, around the baptismal font and within four feet of the altar steps.

Suspended above the wood parquet altar will be a new seven-foot-tall crucifix handpainted by Franciscan monks in Assisi, Italy. The stained glass window behind the altar is 110 years old and was made in Innsbruck, Austria for St. Bonaventure Church in Philadelphia, which has since closed. The refurbished window, 14 feet tall by 5 feet wide, is called "Adoration of the Shepherds."

The Blessed Sacrament will be reserved in a tabernacle against the wall on the altar. The old church's baptismal font will be redesigned into the base for the original tabernacle which has been refurbished.

"I like to gather as many older artifacts, especially if they have liturgical meaning, that are familiar to parishioners as possible," said the architect, Robert Winthrop. Mr. Winthrop, whose office is in Farmville, has been involved in other building projects in the diocese including the recent renovation of the Cathedral of the Sacred Heart and new worship space of Blessed Sacrament Church in Harrisonburg.

Observing that the worship space takes the form of a Great Hall, Father Metzger explained, "the intention was to make it a much bigger room, but still make it cozy. No seating is more than half the distance from the altar than it was from the farthest point in the old church."

There will be a reconciliation room off the main altar. A grand piano will be placed



New worship space at St. Theresa's, Farmville, is tied into original church, center, which has been transformed into the Great Hall.

at the side of the altar with the choir and musicians visible to the congregation. Another addition will be an 18-inch brass menorah from the Jewish community of Richmond.

The entire project, including furnishings, cost approximately \$600,000. The fundraising, coordinated by Carole Kahway, diocesan director of development, began in January 1997.

"The people have been very generous in spite of unemployment at 9 percent in our area, which covers six counties," Father Metzger said.

The congregation of 290 families had been gathering for Mass in St. Theresa's parish center since last September after a groundbreaking ceremony and liturgy. Parishioners, aided by college students from Hampden-Sydney and Longwood, moved church furnishings and equipment from the old church to the center within an hour.

Father Metzger, who regularly worshipped at St. Theresa's while a student at Hampden-Sydney, has been pastor of the Farmville parish since June, 1995. He emphasized that the building committee, headed by chairman Quentin Wilhelmi, made an effort to keep all in the parish community informed on fundraising and building progress through weekly updates in the parish bulletin and frequently from the pulpit at Sunday Mass.

In addition to Mr. Wilhelmi and Father Metzger, members of the committee were Tracy Carilli, Carolyn Culicerto, Mark French, Dale Graham, Shirley O'Neil, Pete



Father Joseph Metzger, St. Theresa's pastor, left, with Robert Winthrop, architect.

Aldi, Ed Aubin and Ralph Charlton.

The dedication liturgy on June 13 will not be the first official event in the new church. An ecumenical prayer service featuring the clergy from local churches will be held on Thursday, June 11, at 7 p.m.