

WITNESS STATEMENT OF PATRICIA FREDERICK

Jesuit Centre - Loyola House - My Spiritual Growth and Relationship

My name is Patricia Frederick, I am a Roman Catholic, residing at 118 Montgomery Avenue in Toronto, and I have been making 8-day retreats at the Jesuit Centre Loyola House yearly for the past 8 years. Here is a part of my story!

It was in the last 1980's (1987-1989), I'm not quite sure, but the Charismatic Renewal has a weekend retreat for its members there, and I had the pleasure of being invited. I was blown away by the tranquility, beauty, peace and serenity of the place. What stayed with me however, was the distance from Toronto and that I needed a car to get there, since I was taken to Guelph by my friend. And so because of distance I never enquired about alternative means of transportation to get there.

In 1998, the Archdiocese of Toronto, in the Office of Lay Ministry and Chaplaincy, employed me and one of the perks of this job was an 8-day retreat yearly. In 1999 I looked at various retreat addresses where I could spend eight days of silence and be guided in Ignatian Spirituality. My co-worker suggested Loyola House! How would I get there? Oh she said you can get there by the Greyhound Bus, I use it all the time!

I registered for my 8-day retreat in June of 1999, and I was assigned a director. She was a sister from Australia, who had just completed the training to be a Retreat Director. She was working at Loyola House until the end of August. This was my first 8-day retreat, and what grace and blessing I received! This retreat changed my spiritual life, my outlook on life and my relationship with God. Sister taught me how to pray with scripture and how to listen to the message of the scripture.

That retreat took me back to my childhood – there were cows calving at that time and during my walk after breakfast, what memories flooded my mind as I admired the calves born the night

before, as I relived the years spent with my grandmother on her farm and the association of cow and calf. The experience at that first retreat is what has had me coming back year after year to Loyola House. Where could I have found such a place?

The silence, the abundance of nature, the beauty and clarity of the sky, the sunshine and the rain, the peace.

In July of 2000 I went back to Loyola House, and Fr. Monty Williams was my Spiritual Director. 1999 was just a taste of what 2000 could be and more. My retreat there was so wonderful and grace-filled. I came back to Toronto to my sister whom I had to take to North York General Hospital on that first weekend of August, after six weeks she was buried. The Spiritual fulfillment I received could only have been possible from Loyola House Jesuit Centre. It was the right mixture of silence, nature, peace, that created the atmosphere of prayerfulness, which enabled gave me to feel God's grace as I left the Jesuit Centre. It was that grace that helped me to deal with my sister's death without falling to pieces.

In June 2001 I returned to Loyola House and while there was no immediate trauma confronting me on my return from the retreat, in November my younger sister who lives in Edmonton was stricken with Osteo Sarcoma in her mouth requiring massive surgery on her face and lots of reconstructive surgery. I was able to go to God with my fears and intercede for my sister during her time of illness, and I was given the strength to go to be with her for one month to help with her nurse herself back to some form of health, whereby she could do things for herself, and thus gain some control over her life again.

These are just some of the blessings I received from Loyola House Jesuit Centre. Every year when I return to Loyola House, since 1999, it is with the knowledge that I will be spiritually renewed and refreshed to cope with whatever stress I might be called on to deal with in my personal life.

There is something about being in the company of a group of people who are gathered for the same reason.

It is with a deep sense of regret that I have learnt that a 155,000 sq.ft. of commercial development is planned for the area around the Jesuit Centre Site. If this site were constructed, there would be no silence within the vicinity of the Centre for prayer and meditation, which is essential for spiritual development. When this ingredient is taken away from us the sacredness of that space will disappear. If spirituality is to bloom, we need the right mixture of nature, silence, peace, yes and even the animals!

One of the benefits of being at Loyola House Jesuit Centre is the opportunity to do a meditation walk after dinner down to the cemetery, entering the cemetery where you feel the peace and prayerfulness of those buried there. I cannot describe that feeling, you have to experience it yourself to know what it feels like. You could not imagine the benefits of this exercise – peace, prayer and revelation.

In the morning my meditation walk is before or after breakfast around the immediate grounds as I experience the freshness of the dew on the grass, as I marvel at God's providence in giving not only humans, but also the fruit trees, flowers and grass the nourishment to provide harmony in our lives.

A commercial development in that area will rob us of experiencing that peace and quiet, as all forms and traffic will invade the area and deprive us of the sacredness of space for spiritual development and growth.

The area would then be filled with lots of noise and traffic – ingredients which detracts from the sacredness of space.

With this proposed development the Jesuit Centre Loyola House will not provide the atmosphere of prayerfulness that envelops my spirit when I arrive there.

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