

St. Lawrence Thrift Shop 1982-2005

The St. Lawrence Thrift Shop, presently located at 111-113 Railroad Avenue, Sayville, will close its doors and go out of business on May 31, 2005, after almost twenty-five years of service to the Sayville community, especially the poor. The name given to the shop when it opened was "Turn-Over Thrift Store"; this was a take on the legend of St. Lawrence the Martyr, who when he was being killed by the Roman Emperor by being grilled on an open fire, is said to have remarked to his executioners: "You can turn me over; I'm done on this side!" The thrift store allowed us to "turn over" our used clothing for sale (or free distribution to the poor). But the store, like St. Lawrence, who stands for the poor, had a tough time existing in the hard and uncharitable realities of the rental property market.

When the store opened in 1982, it was housed, along with a book shop, in a reconditioned garage behind the rectory. Storage was afforded by two cargo containers attached to the east side of the building. After several years, the condition of the building and the cargo containers deteriorated from rust and weather. In 1999, we made the decision to scrap the rusted containers and to rehabilitate the building to create suitable space for our Parish Outreach, which had outgrown its 10x10 office in the rectory. In making this move, we relocated the Thrift Shop to its present location, just north of the Sayville Movies.

When we moved the Thrift Shop to rented space, we realized that almost all the proceeds of the store would go towards rent, and that this would reduce the amount which the store was able to contribute in the past toward the general support of Parish Outreach. But at a meeting with Father John Rowan, the Thrift Shop volunteers said that the store had purposes other than fund-raising; for example, the store was an inventory of usable clothing for the poor, who could pick up a voucher at the Parish Outreach and get the items they needed at the store.

We signed a three year lease for the 900 square foot space in a driveway off Railroad Avenue. Linda, the manager and the Thrift Shop volunteers fixed up the selling floor and the store continued, making a small profit which was used to support Parish Outreach. At the end of the lease period, January 2004, the landlord, Joseph Farino, Jr., whose office is at 584 Middle Road, Bayport, offered us a new lease with a 40% increase in rent. Later, he came down to a 25% increase, and we signed for another three years. As we began the new lease, the monthly rent was \$1650, and we paid Mr. Farino another \$200.00 for dumpster service, an annual sum of \$22,000.00.

Several months into the new lease it became clear that the Thrift Shop could not afford this rent. We had raised the prices, increased the selling hours, advertised, but we were not even breaking even. In addition, another retail store had come on the market in Sayville, with a rent of \$800.00 a month. Father Rowan called Mr. Farino and told him we were going under and asked if we could get out of the lease. Mr. Farino responded that he would take up the matter with his attorney, that is William P. Fitzgerald, whose office is at 320 West Main Street, Sayville (just a block west of our church). In a few days, Mr. Fitzgerald indicated that the termination of the lease at this time would cost the church \$20,000.00. During the delay caused by this unfortunate information, the \$800.00 store was rented to another party.

The lease contained provisions for early termination beginning on June 1, 2005, so we waited until we were in range of that date, and gave notice that we intended to invoke such provisions, pay the stated damages, and leave the premises. This would have cost the church \$5250.00. In response to our notice Mr. Farino and Mr. Fitzgerald went combing through the present lease and the prior lease to come up with charges and damages that would total \$17,566.39 when added to the \$5250.00 aforementioned. \$8087.05 of these charges are based on the lease that expired eighteen months ago; bringing them up at this time serves little purpose except to reveal an attitude, which is already fully demonstrated. An example of the charges against the present lease is \$720.00, designated "common charges"; not invoked by the landlord before, possibly because it would have drawn attention to the substandard condition of the driveway, which was paved just last week, fifty-six months into our tenancy there. After a review of the charges, the church is acknowledging a total of \$9497.34 in charges and damages to get out of the lease on May 31, 2005. Over the period of the tenancy, and with the early termination charges, we will have paid to Mr. Farino over \$100,000.00!

As we leave the Railroad Avenue space, there is no affordable rental space in our parish to which we can move the Thrift Shop. We will continue to look for space because the Thrift Shop is a very valuable ministry and community resource, a noble service of loyal and compassionate volunteers, a critical link to Parish Outreach in its service to the poor, a great opportunity for all members of the community to donate usable clothing, knowing it will be used again by some appreciative person, and a fun place where bargains can be had for both adults and children. We shall return.