



# Annual Report

January 1, 2021 to  
December 31, 2021

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www.shemcenter.org

## From the Director:

Dear Friends of Shem Center,

As another year passes without being able to gather safely, Shem Center continues to maintain a presence in today's world. Our declared mission is a simple one. Promote respect, understanding and friendship among all people of all faiths and spiritual paths, as well as what I call "the spiritually homeless," those feeling disenfranchised from a faith tradition or spiritual path.

This mission has become increasingly challenging as civility, truth telling and ordinary kindness toward each other becomes less and less a part of everyday life. It seems to have gone far beyond the grumpyness we may all be feeling these days. Yet we acknowledge and are grateful for those who serve us as health care providers as well as others we need to function in everyday life. With families and friends separated because of differing views of a disease that has become politicized, a few kind and reassuring words from behind an N95 mask breaks through with a small bit of kindness we may need to get through the day.

A dangerous death dealing covid, now well over 900,000 in the U.S. alone, dictates a necessary distancing to maintain life among adults and children alike. Not surprisingly, those not vaccinated are among the most vulnerable and are a factor in keeping "life as we knew it" from returning. It is becoming increasingly apparent that, "back to normal" is not likely to happen as we create new ways to live going forward.

The Shem Center archives maintained since our beginnings in 1993 reveal an amazing story of travel throughout the country and the many creative retreat experiences we brought with us. A hallmark of Shem Center's work has always been bringing people together using The Dances of Universal Peace with a sacred phrase from one of the world's religions or spiritual paths chanted and danced within a circle — hardly something that is possible on Zoom. How freeing it was not to have to even think about CDC guidelines. Things are different now. Creative ways to use Zoom and other on line technologies are being explored as ways to continue our work.

Aware of the human suffering caused by an unpredictable disease throughout the world,. we are challenged to embrace a much larger world. All humans, and indeed all of creation has been gathered together in an inescapable story of survival. The differences and distinctions that have kept us feeling comfortably separate from one another and from the natural world begins to disappear when life itself is on the line. Covid and the climate crisis is leaving a leveling path of pain in its wake.

Thank you for your friendship and support as Shem Center finds ways to proclaim its message of respect and inclusiveness. I ask that you regularly view our newly designed web site to keep informed of Shem Center going forward. <[www.shemcenter.org](http://www.shemcenter.org)>

**With respect and deep gratitude,**

**Joseph Kilikevice, OP  
Director**

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*"There will be no peace among the nations  
without peace among the religions.*

*There will be no peace among the religions without  
dialogue among the religions."*

— Hans Küng

## **Shem Center Vision & Purpose Going Forward**

Preparing the Shem Center Annual Report for 2021 offers an opportunity to reflect upon our vision and purpose as we go forward. Given the many changes in our lives due to the pandemic the likelihood that “back to normal” will not be what we long for. The unvaccinated in our own country and throughout the rest of the world will continue to keep us all living in a state of self protection. The degree of preoccupation with being safe from infection will depend upon our own experiences of loved ones who have died or who are permanently affected by the pandemic and the degree of observance of safety measures in place where we live, work and travel. At the time of this writing approximately one million have died from complications due to covid in the USA alone. We have long since passed the level of grief and shock over the 9/11 deaths that numbered 2,977. Denial and numbness seems to be keeping us from acknowledging this reality.

Shem Center’s response to this will continue with our message of respect, civility, kindness and inclusiveness. The loss of these qualities in the world today requires our re-commitment to them.

The Shem Center Circle of Respect, a guided meditation that is always used to open any Shem Center gathering establishes the ground upon which we stand as a place where all can expect to be treated with respect even in the midst of disagreement. Anyone can use this simple way to begin a meeting. A written version can be found on the Shem Center web site. Those who use it report meetings that are more engaging and productive. This is true when used with both adults and children.

We plan to continue our programs on Zoom. Male Sprit, the Advent bread baking retreat and the Aramaic words of Jesus retreat will continue to be offered. Spiritual Direction appointments will also continue on Zoom or in Shem Center’s back yard, weather permitting.

Our newly appointed Assistant Director, Steve Miller and I meet regularly on Zoom to re-imagine Shem Center’s programs as we discuss plans for Shem Center’s future. Steve and I already have a history of working together as co-leaders of Male Spirit retreats. We have come to expect creative and innovative ideas to emerge whenever we plan Shem Center experiences.

New initiatives for Shem Center include seeking ways to establish relationships among faith traditions and spiritual paths other than our own, and responding to the climate crisis that challenges us to encounter creation with appreciation for its gifts and celebration of its grandeur.

You are invited to view our newly designed website for regularly updated postings.

[www.ShemCenter.org](http://www.ShemCenter.org)

Joseph Kilikevici, Director





## **Good News about Shem Center's Future**

*Steve Miller honors  
Joe as an elder-teacher  
with a Lakota blanket during  
the 2019 Male Spirit Retreat,  
LaSalle Manor Retreat Center,  
Plano, Illinois*



## We're Adding New Leadership



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Nov. 11, 2021

Dear Steve,

Your involvement with Shem Center's Male Spirit program for many years both as a participant and partner with Joe as a retreat leader holds an impressive history of, creative, joyful, profoundly moving and memorable sacred gatherings. Driving to the retreat at LaSalle Manor in Plano, Illinois from from South Dakota with your sons, presenting them, each in turn, for a Male Spirit rite of passage, bringing your son-in-law and some students from the University of South Dakota, all speaks to your enthusiastic embrace of what Shem Center and its Male Spirit program offers. The mutual respect that marks your friendship with Joe is a gift that strengthens Shem Center's presence in a world that struggles to remember how preeminent it is.

Your own spiritual path, enhanced by your years of ministry as a Pastor in the UCC Church, a teacher at the University of South Dakota and your respect and friendship with the Lakota People has forged you into an energetic adherent to Shem Center's interfaith mission of respect and radical inclusivity. Bringing your considerable music skills as well as certification as a leader in the Dances of Universal Peace greatly enhances the gifts you bring to Shem Center programs.

The Board of Directors of the Shem Center for Interfaith Spirituality is pleased to offer you the position of *Assistant Director*, joining Joseph Kilikevici who holds the title, *Founding Director*. This position will commence in January of 2022 with the exact date TBD. Job description and remuneration will be developed collaboratively with you and Joe over the first quarter of 2022 and presented to the Board for approval in April/May of 2022.

As we envision and welcome the many possibilities that present themselves with your joining Joe in this ongoing venture, we are grateful that the mission of Shem Center, begun during the 1993 Chicago Parliament of the World's Religions will continue.

We look forward to your acceptance of this invitation to join Joe as  
*Assistant Director of Shem Center.*

Sincerely,

Wayne Vanek

Joe Kilikevici

Terry Kinsey



Steve Miller.  
Assistant Director





# **The First Church in Jaffrey**

*Gathered 1780*

A Congregational Church of the United Church of Christ

On the Common – Jaffrey Center, New Hampshire

*No matter who you are, or where you are on life's journey, you are welcome here.*

Shem Center Board of Directors

Dear Joe, Terry, and Wayne,

In January 1992, I attended my first interfaith retreat with Brother Joe. It was a Male Spirit gathering held at the Resurrection Center in Woodstock, Illinois. The following year, the Shem Center was founded and in these intervening years, I have participated regularly in a myriad of programs and offerings (Male Spirit, Circle of Brothers, Bread-Baking, Aramaic Jesus, Dances of Universal Peace, Parliament of World Religions). Participation in Shem Center offerings has allowed me to develop amazing relationships with deeply spiritual people from a wide variety of backgrounds, taught me the value of respectful and practical exploration and dialogue with other faith traditions, and finally, has provided a profound spiritual canvas from which I may continue to imagine and create a world of peace and unity that is the on-going dream of the generations of humankind.

Beyond the programmatic aspects of Shem Center, Joe has become a revered mentor and a lifelong friend. His constant presence in my life has been the precious gift of a faithful guide and companion. When another friend once asked why this connection was so important to me, I replied without thinking, "When I am engaged with Joe and these people, doing this vital work, it is the closest I have ever felt to heaven on earth."

For over 35 years, I have served churches in the United Church of Christ as pastor and teacher. From Iowa to Connecticut to South Dakota, I have been privileged to companion hundreds of dear souls in their exploration of and service to the vision of radical hospitality and inclusive justice that is found in the spirit of Christ. At this point in my life, however, I have begun to grow into what Hindus would call *Vanaprastha* – a time of moving away from social and move from the center of action and leadership into the helping role of elder or advisor. I have just recently become pastor of a much smaller part time church in Jaffrey, New Hampshire. Couple this emerging time and space with my deep love of chant and dance and spiritual exploration and world religions and silence, and I am poised for my next great adventure albeit a slow and quiet path.

It is, therefore, with great excitement and respect, that I accept your offer to become the new assistant director of the Shem Center. I am eager to work beside Joe to continue the amazing work of Shem into the future. I am ready to start as soon as the board decides, and I look forward to working out the practical details of this new position with Joe.

Rumi reminds us to "Let the beauty we love, be what we do!" Thank you for giving me this honor and opportunity.

With deep respect,

Steve Miller



## Monthly Zoom Meeting

Monthly check-in Zoom events are now scheduled for the 4th Saturdays of the month, 10:00am to 11:30am Central Time. Men who have attended our weekend retreats as well as men new to Male Spirit are welcome to join us. All are asked to register and to make a commitment to be present for the entire time from the traditional Shem Center opening “Circle of Respect” to the closing words of gratitude and farewell.

Besides theme presentations, sacred chant and ritual led by by Joe Kilikevici and Steve Miller, time is given for men to connect with each other in small randomly selected groups. While gathering in person is not yet safe to resume due to the uncertainty of the pandemic, this substitute is working well for both men who have had a Male Spirit experience as well as newcomers. All are always warmly welcomed.

The mutual support men have for ongoing friendships and the spiritual nourishment we can offer each other has always been an important part of Male Spirit work. This highbred adaptation is maintaining the spirit of Male Spirit as we see our number of participants grow each month.

### Our Next meeting scheduled for February 26th, 10 to 11:30am Central Time

The meeting will honor Thich Nhat Hanh and his highly respected teachings throughout the world. His recent death brings to mind the many ways he has influenced Male Spirit and other Shem Center programs over the years. His legacy continues in Shem Center programs. Recall the morning single file Buddhist Walks we took together on the weekend retreats, silently claiming each footstep as a blessing for the earth — and imagining a flower blooming beneath each footstep each time we lifted our foot off the ground to take another step, consciously bringing peace to the earth.

These 90 minute Zoom gatherings are offered to reaffirm Male Spirit retreat experiences for men who have made the retreat as well as to warmly welcome new men who wish to join us.

**Date, time and Zoom link** for each meeting can be had by sending an e-mail to Steve Miller.

StephenGeorgeMiller7@gmail.com

2010 Male Spirit  
Retreat  
Plano, Illinois





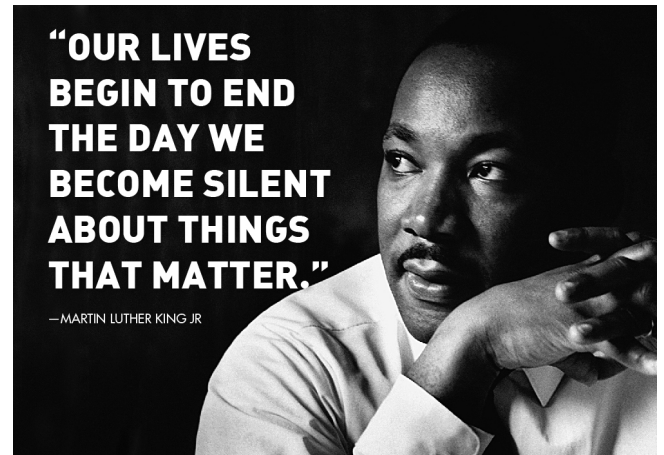
## Shem Center's Challenge

Today we face unprecedented challenges that require not only accurate information and truth telling, but also the critical thinking and a commitment to engage in respectful dialogue and courageous action. Not to be engaged in this process is clearly a dangerous choice. Our silence and inaction have consequences that make our overly privatized spiritual journeys obsolete.

Looking back on Shem Center's years of offering retreats throughout the country and other parts of the world, we proclaimed a respectful inclusiveness as we considered the wisdom of the religions and spiritual paths of the people of the world. Openness to the Divine Presence found in traditions beyond one's own is itself a major breakthrough for many. A simple statement, seldom if ever heard by people has become that aha moment that moves one forward. I simply say, "One does not have to give up anything of one's own religion in order to be blessed and enriched by the religions and spiritual paths of others."

The Creator filled the world with amazing beauty and rich diversity. It is there for us to discover and to receive its blessings.

This appreciation and respect for diversity is key to the dialogue and action that the spiritual journey requires today. Surrounded by dissension and hostility, a respectful exchange with those with whom we may disagree has become nearly impossible. The current thinking is often, "Because you're different from me, you're wrong and therefore an enemy." Our times of prayer, reflection and meditation, practices from which we personally benefit now end with the question, "Now what?" Even the silence we have come to love in our spiritual practice recalls a famous quote from Dr. Martin Luther King, "In the end we will remember not the words of our enemies, but the silence of our friends."



## Shem Center Annual Gala Concert



The concert took place on Sunday, May 23, 2021. Due to the covid pandemic our guests were invited to enjoy the concert from the safety of their own homes by way of Zoom technology.

Using selections celebrating creation, our common home we presented the music of Hildegard of Bingen, 11th century Abbess, mystic & composer, Shem Center offered this concert using quality recording of the "The Hildegard Singers" of Grand Rapids, Michigan who joined us from a performance studio at Aquinas Dominican College in Grand Rapids. The singers joined us with commentary on their professionally produced recordings.

While the music was superb and the presence of the singers and their comments engaging, we missed the in-person gatherings of past gala concerts. Participation and donations were less than hoped for, and the exchange between performers and audience was greatly missed.

## Spiritual Direction

Spiritual Direction, sometimes called “spiritual companionship,” is offered at SHEM Center to those interested in deepening their relationship with God within the context of conversation with a director trained and experienced in “the art of holy listening.”

While Spiritual Direction may be deeply healing, it is not therapy, a professional relationship focused on resolving psychological problems. Spiritual Direction is instead focused on the spiritual journey by noticing and responding to God who is present in the events of one’s life, inner desires and prayer.

The environment is respectful, supportive and confidential. Appointments are usually scheduled on Zoom. In person appointments may also be possible with strict adherence to the most recent CDC guidelines.

Brother Joseph Kilikevice, OP

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## The Aramaic Words of Jesus

A Zoom retreat is planned for Sunday, May 15, 2022 to reflect upon the Aramaic words of Jesus. Retreat guides will be Neal Douglas Klotz, (Saadi) and Br. Joseph Kilikevice. We will consider touching the source of Jesus’ spirituality to heal the holes left by religion. A title, description and registration details are in preparation and will be announced on the Shem Center web site.



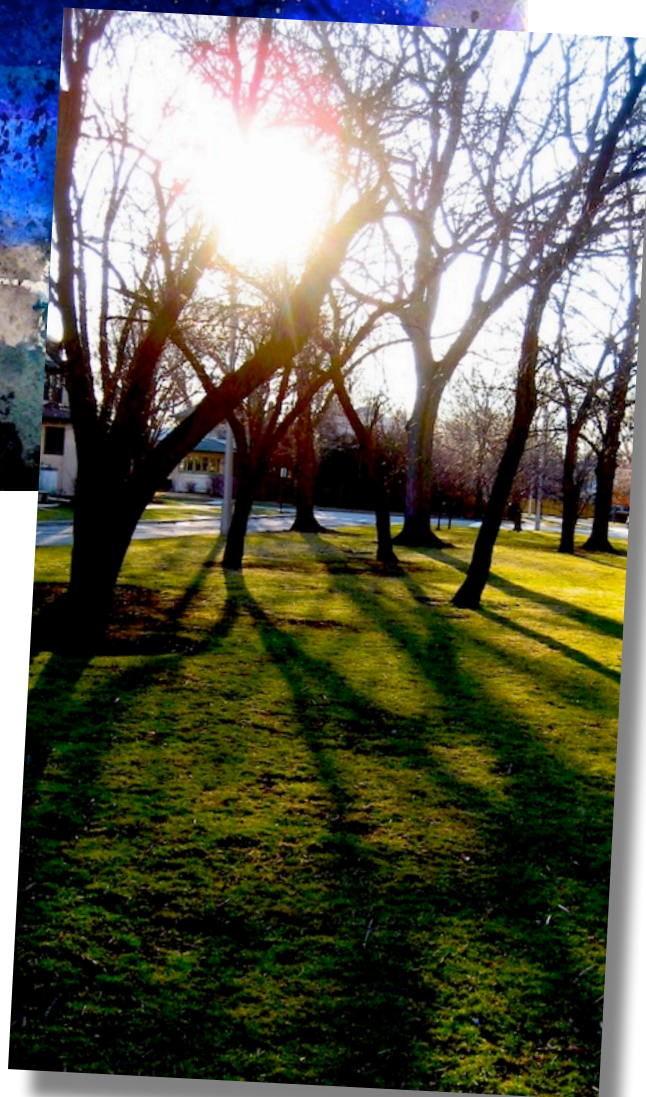
*Christ Redeemer, c.1410  
Andre Rublev*



## ***Blessing of Hope***

*So may we know  
the hope  
that is not just  
for someday  
but for this day  
here, now,  
in this moment  
that opens to us  
hope not made  
of wishes  
but of substance  
hope made of sinew  
and muscle  
and bone  
hope that has breath  
and a beating heart  
hope that will not  
keep quiet  
and be polite  
hope that knows  
how to holler  
when it is called for  
hope that knows  
how to sing  
when there seems  
little cause  
hope that raises us  
from the dead  
not someday  
but this day,  
every day,  
again and  
again and  
again.*

— Jan Richardson



# Shem Center Financial Report 2021

Fiscal Year 2021

January 1, 2021 to  
December 31, 2021

The figures in this report represent our financial status during 2021, a year of both challenges and opportunities. You, our faithful and generous friends have helped keep Shem Center solvent and for this we are deeply grateful. Because we have not been renting space in retreat centers for our programs, by far the biggest expense when scheduling retreats, we now ask for a donation from the participant in any amount. Some can give a little while others are able to give more. This arrangement has made it possible for our programs now done on Zoom to be affordable to anyone.

While writing this report Shem Center has had to face an unexpected financial emergency. The cost to us will appear in the 2022 financial report.

Major plumbing and sewer problems, years in the making, made hiring a company qualified to address them necessary. With considerable disruption, dirt and expense the work has been completed. The amount due is well over \$20,000. The complete replacement of a basement restroom that now resembles an archaeological dig, will have to wait until funds are available.

Anyone living in an older house and facing plumbing problems can perhaps tell a similar story. Your tax-deductible donation at this time in any amount will help pay this unexpected bill. Thank you for your generosity.

**Note:** Financial figures for the year 2021 are in preparation and will be attached to this report on the Shem Center web site when available.

*Let us come alive to the splendor  
that is all around us and see the  
beauty in ordinary things.*

Thomas Merton





## How to be a poet

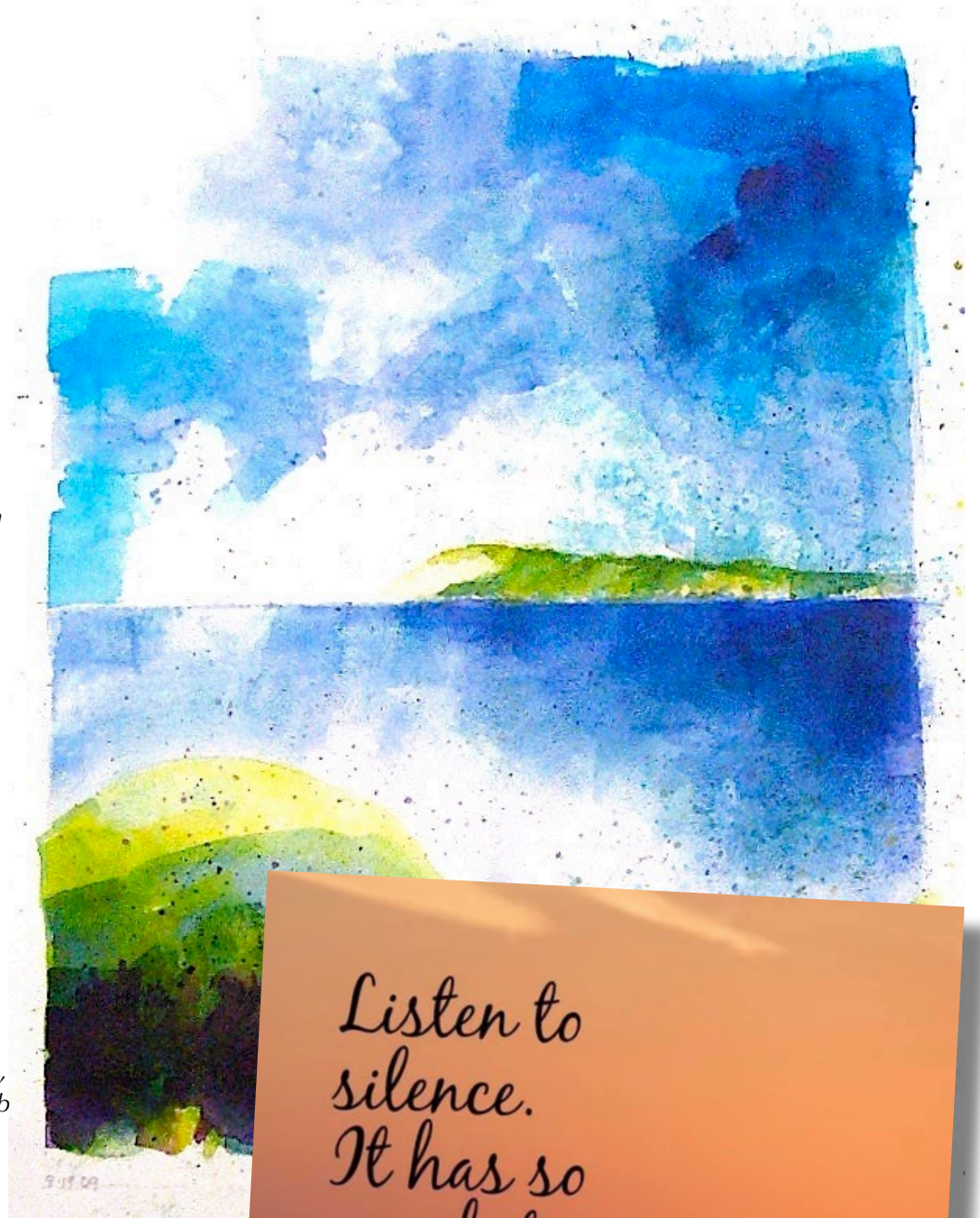
*Make a place to sit down.  
Sit down. Be quiet.  
You must depend upon  
affection, reading, knowledge,  
skill—more of each  
than you have—inspiration,  
work, growing older, patience,  
for patience joins time  
to eternity. Any readers  
who like your work,  
doubt their judgment.*

*Breathe with unconditional breath  
the unconditioned air.  
Shun electric wire.  
Communicate slowly. Live  
a three-dimensional life;  
stay away from screens.*

*Stay away from anything  
that obscures the place it is in.  
There are no unsacred places;  
there are only sacred places  
and desecrated places.*

*Accept what comes from silence.  
Make the best you can of it.  
Of the little words that come  
out of the silence, like prayers  
prayed back to the one who prays,  
make a poem that does not disturb  
the silence from which it came.*

— Wendell Berry



*Listen to  
silence.  
It has so  
much to say*

*rumi*

