Timothy Miller: It’s October 5th, 2010. We’re in Smith Hall at KU and we are having an interview with Father Monsignor Vince Krische who lives in Lawrence or did live in Lawrence for many years previously. Let me say at the outset, we’re trying to make a public record of this, these will be put on our website so don’t say anything that would be deep dark secret, not that I would expect that.

We’d like to start with a little bit of your story. What was your childhood like? How did you become a priest? How did you undertake that matter of very serious dedication?

Father Vince Krische: I think of this often. I consider my life to have been a blessing. Both of my parents were Catholic and both of my extended families were Catholic. I had always the support of my immediate family but also my extended family. We grew up in the Church – the family was first and the Church was second. Whenever the family got together there was always some discussion going on about church.

I had an uncle who was also a priest and I had an older brother who was also a priest. Sometimes I wonder if – they seem to be held up on a pedestal all the time and I thought, “Well maybe that wouldn’t be so bad.” I was influenced by them a lot, I think. I’m one of seven children. I’m the middle one. There are two boys, a girl, me, a girl, and two boys, so I was kind of the peak child. I went through Catholic all through elementary school and high school. Then I thought maybe I might be called to the priesthood, wasn’t sure, and entered the seminary. You always enter the seminary with the idea not that you’re going to be a priest, but that you’re going to be a seminarian and see where it leads. Well, it just kept leading me.

You know, when I was in school, at the end of every semester, they would post a list on the board and say, “The following men are requested not to come back the following semester.” So I’d always go to the bulletin to board to see if my name was there. Mine never appeared. I guess here I am. I’ve been ordained since 1964 which I think is 46 years now. It has been a most wonderful life for me. I can’t imagine any other way of life that would have provided me with the opportunities, with the freedom, with the people, and with the friends. One of the things I find impressive is the networking you can do in the Church. I can say who I am and pretty soon I meet with somebody else. There are connections. I’ve had a very nice experience.

Most of my priestly life has been spent in the university. I was eight years at Washburn University and 28 years at Kansas University. Boy, I love KU. I had wonderful bishops who were my supervisors. The greatest bishop was Archbishop Strecker. He was the kind of a leader who I knew – because we had a lot of work at the St. Lawrence Center – he was the kind of leader who would let me stretch myself to the end of the branch and maybe almost let me fall but he would never let me fall. I had that confidence that he was always behind me, always supportive and always willing to be of assistance. If I got depressed, I could call him maybe at 9 o’clock in the morning and he’d be there at 11. He was a kind of open supervisor himself who challenged me to do this and the supported me all the way through it.
His image for us was that we would become a true Newman Center. I don’t know if you are familiar with that. Most college campuses have a Newman Center but those are not true Newman Centers they’re more like clubs. It’s a place you can belong to or a lounge with a TV. But he wanted us to develop the true idea of University which was given to us by John Henry Cardinal Newman. My latest visit was two weeks ago to England when Cardinal Newman was beatified. He’s called Blessed Newman. But he wrote an interesting book at the end of the 19th century entitled The Idea of a University. He was always promoting the idea of liberal arts education, that people should be educated in the liberal arts first and then advance in graduate school perhaps into a profession they would choose. He saw also at that time higher education in England was becoming very specialized and was being built on what was utilitarian. That was the beginning of specialization utilitarian approach and that’s what we have today. He believed a university that did not teach theology was not a true university. He believed theology was a true science and that we had to have that. We became a teaching institution – well we were not technically a school of theology – but we had five people with masters degrees on our staff who were teaching and we had very interested students. One of the things students would say to me was, “This class in theology makes the rest of my education make sense.” Somehow there’s a unifying principle that brings everything else together that makes everything make sense. A lot of students said this.

I was here for 28 years and then I got transferred to a parish. I had never been in a parish my entire life so I had no idea what to do. I had thought these people would be like students – they weren’t. They thought I’d be like a pastor – I wasn’t. Finally, I was staff on the KU football team for fifteen years. We had a couple good years in there. I was interested in the grade school football program and had a lot of fun with that. I had a real challenge trying to get people interested in understanding and developing their faith. That was really where eventually I figured I wasn’t making much progress. I figured they would do better if they had a younger priest here and I chose to retire and come back to where I wanted to be the whole time – Lawrence.

Student: Where was the parish?

VK: In Topeka. Oh, no I was in a parish in St. Anne’s in Prairie Village.

TM: Are you from Kansas originally?

VK: Yeah, I’m from Topeka.

TM: So that’s where your extended family was based?

VK: Yeah, I still have three brothers there. A few aunts and uncles but mostly they’re all departed.

TM: You went to seminary in the arch diocese in Denver?
VK: At that time, all of us would have been sent to Denver. Now, most people are sent to St. Louis or Chicago. We chose Denver.

TM: Is there a seminary here?

VK: No. You have to be a pretty big diocese to be able to run a seminary, to have a faculty, and to meet the requirements for having one.

TM: There used to be a high school seminary. I believe that’s not functioning anymore.

VK: That has not been functioning for a long time.

TM: I wonder if you can say something about, and in a way compare when you came to and when you left St. Lawrence, what was life like in the Catholic community on campus when you got here. For openers, was it in the same location?

VK: It was in the same location. There were five houses around there we were able to purchase. Three of those we were able to move off the land and two of them were not sound so we had to tear those down. When I arrived our budget was $32,000. It was given to us by the arch diocese. We had one full time person and a secretary. We had a building which was a house. I was really scared. I didn’t want to come to KU. Bishop was making a mistake, he has the wrong person.

When I think back, I think it was set up. I arrived on a Saturday and I moved into the house and I was there that evening. The doorbell rings. Here’s this young woman, school was just starting, and she said, “I was wondering if you could tell me anything about the monophysite heresy.” I thought oh my gosh, I haven’t talked about that for years. I think somebody set her up just to see how smart I was, how capable I was to handle the job.

The place was in disrepair. I went to the arch bishop and I said the place looks awful. It just didn’t look very good. The basement had flooded out. A lot of people at the end of last semester had left their stuff and it was all water damaged. He said, “Well why don’t we just do something cosmetic and make it look better.” Smell better. He gave me $15,000. This was in 1977. We just painted and put some wallpaper up.

Then one day – and this is why I believe in God so much because things happen unexpectedly. So one day we’re out there painting and this big white lincoln goes down crescent road and pretty soon the brakes go on. The car backs up – and at that time there was a drive way – backs up into the driveway, and this tall gentleman, very distinguished, gets out of his big white Continental and says, “Hello, I’m John O’Leary.” So I introduced myself and he asks, “So, what goes on here?” I said, “I don’t know, I just got here. I don’t know myself. What do you think should go on?” We had a bit of a conversation and when we finished, he pulled out his checkbook and he wrote me a check for a hundred dollars. No one had ever done that for me in my life. He handed it to me and then reached into his suit pocket and pulled out his card and said, “If you ever need
any help, give me a call,” and gave me his card. So, he was the president of the KU alumni association and graduated in 1948. He lived out in western Kansas so he always said he was the unusual guy. He was the jayhawker in wildcat territory, he was a democrat in republican territory, and he was a Catholic in Protestant territory. I know how to deal with people; I know how to get along. So, I waited for about two weeks and gave him a call. I asked, “Do you think you could help me find some alumni and raise some money?” He said, “Yeah, I’m going to be in town again and I’ll stop by.” That was the beginning of what happened.

We found a lot of people who were KU alumni. We started a campaign and this is where we are today. But the building and all that was mostly designed for the program. The program is what’s most important – what happens to people.

TM: Are there a lot of people involved?

VK: There were a lot of people. When I started the budget was 32,000 and when I left it was 1.3 million. I was really surprised one day the chancellor called me and that had never happened. We were talking and he said, “What’s your annual budget there?” I said, “1.3 million.” He said, “Do you know you give a 1.3 million dollar gift to the university every year? The students that are involved in your program are having a good college experience and that’s what we want for all our students.” I thought that was really really nice and was taken aback by it. The great thing here at KU was I really wanted to become a partner with the university and work together because we were all involved in the same endeavor – helping young people discover where they want to go in life. Helping them have a good college experience. At that time it was the school of religion and I was invited to sit on a board. Chancellor Budig came and he was really helpful. He said, “The most important thing you have to do is be visible on this campus.” So you go to basketball games, football games, you go to lectures, you go to different things so that you get to know people. That was a very fortunate thing for me, too, I got to know so many people. Even now, it’s so nice being back because you see people at the restaurants or grocery store and oh it’s so great you’re back. Lawrence is like a family. I think Vice Chancellor Ambler’s goal was to build more and more community within the university. I kept thinking how are you going to do it? This is place is so big so differentiated but he was right and we were able to do that.

TM: Can you say something about what day to day life in the center? What did students do when they went there?

VK: We did not want to… The familiar phrase at this time nationally at many centers was that we just have lounge lizards. People come and turn on the TV and watch a soap opera or have a cup of coffee or whatever. We were different. We wanted to be an education center. We wanted to have a holistic approach and we wanted our students to come there for a reason. They would come here for a purpose. Either they were going to take a class, volunteer their efforts in things we were putting forth, they were going to be involved in some service projects, but the most important thing that we wanted was that they take the classes.
We estimated at the time there were 8,000 Catholic students on KU campus. I don’t know what they would estimate today. We have 300 students taking classes during the week. We had classes in the afternoon after many of the classes were through here and we had classes in the evenings. Then we found out along with – and this is also Newman’s idea – along with the teaching of faith, we also had to have spiritual direction and guidance so that they could absorb and integrate their faith in their student life. We were able to rely on others who were able to help us with that.

We did a lot of marriage preparation. I think that’s really important, people getting married and how they look at marriage and understand each other. So we had year long program they would start and take theology and marriage, ordinary finances and communication and all that. We would take a lot of the social implications of marriage – why we have to build marriages to have a strong society a strong structure that was supportive to people. We had that and other church related things like baptisms.

We were a university community. It wasn’t just a student community but it was also university faculty and staff and administration people. We had 120 families. Our focus was not on the family life, it was on the students. Those that became involved wanted to help us with the students. The faculty are what we call the credit card to the university. They can open doors and get you to meet people and get you to know a lot of people.

We were open everyday from eight in the morning until 11 o’clock at night except on Saturdays we closed at five. Students would come there to study. We had a study area, we had a library, and we had a computer center where students could work on computers. We engaged state wide support – and then it was even national support – we had grants from various organizations and then at one point we had support from every state in the union including Hawai’i. We did a national telephone thing. We would call people and alumni. When we first started that, we didn’t even have telephone numbers. Where do you start? I was talking at the endowment association and they helped us get started on it. They came, and in the attic, we found this box of IBM punch cards. Have you heard of those? We had this one woman, she was so wonderful. I credit her for laying the foundation for everything that happened. She took the cards to the alumni association to see if we could read them and then update our information with what was on the cards. We got a pretty significant list. We had this national telephone drive and this one student called a man who asked, “How did you get my name?” He said, “Well, I don’t know. Did you come to St. Lawrence Center at some time when you here.” He said, “I think I did. I was dating a girl who was Catholic.” “That’s probably how we got your name then.” He said, “Listen, take me off your list.” This young man was very sharp. He said, “Well what’s it worth to you?” “Ten bucks, I’ll send it to you, now take me off your list.” Hey, thanks a lot! You paid for the telephone call!

We had a lot of stories like that. We were really green and ventured out on things but it worked. I think when you approach something with a positive attitude and the awareness of the basic goodness of people it works.
Student: What were some of the service projects that stand out in your mind?

VK: We had over a hundred students a year go on a spring break alternative and I always took a group of students each year to Mexico. And we had a great time. I’m not sure if we ever did much work but we grew a lot because we got to meet the people. The idea in this kind of work is to always meet the people and maybe you paint a house or do something like that. But the idea is meeting the people.

We always did a march for life in Washington every year. We took buses of students to Washington for that. We did a lot locally with a food kitchen. You’ve probably heard of the LINK food kitchen in Lawrence. That was started by St. John’s parish and we worked with them then it became ecumenical. We worked with that then we did a lot with young mothers, especially single mothers, with food and clothes and stuff like that. We did a lot of those kinds of projects and it depended a lot on what was going on at the time. A lot of different social issues come up at different times due to various occurrences.

TM: Did you get into a lot of arguments, maybe healthy debates, with students over Church policies?

VK: You know, we didn’t. I think students who were experiencing those kinds of things didn’t come to our place. Seemed like there were students eager to learn why, or to learn why they believed what they believe and why the Church did this or that. We had women’s ordination as a bit of an issue for a while then that kinda faded out.

TM: I would think that would still be a big issue.

VK: Within the Church, as far as I know, I don’t encounter it. There are a lot of things. The birth control issue was big. We’ve come a long way in understanding that and our approach to that which is very creative and very respectful of women. It’s called natural family planning and it’s built on a whole system of theology and biology. One of the concerns with that is Western Europe is experiencing lower populations. Austria is not even reproducing itself. A lot of what was happening back then has now shown some effects that are not good for the human race I think.

Most of our students were more eager. They probably weren’t that informed on Church issues. A lot of what they got would be from the public press and that wasn’t very reliable.

Student: I understand you just visited Britain. How was that experience?

VK: It was wonderful. There was a priest from New Jersey who organized it. I didn’t know any of these priests that were going I met them at the airport. There were five of us and layman from Tulsa and another married couple who said that they’d never travel with a bunch of priests again. One of the things I discovered with them was they wanted to eat when it was time to eat. We like to dine. You sit down and have something before
dinner, and appetizer, a nice meal, a bottle of wine, and you talk about the day. That’s sort of our lifestyle since we’re not married and don’t have families.

It was very interesting how welcome the pope was but there were some protests I guess. For the most part people were welcoming him, even individuals who we talked to, in terms that England needs someone to speak for them. There was a gentleman at Westminster Abbey, I don’t think he was ordained, but he was Anglican, and he said, “England is at the epicenter of self-destruction.” They were hoping the pope would be able to bring a sense a unity. He talked fairly square to parliament and to the queen.

We spent two days in London and we spent a day in Littlemore and Oxford and we spent the rest of the time in Birmingham. The beatification mass was in Birmingham.

TM: Is that where he was?

VK: That’s where the pope was, yeah.

TM: I mean is that where Newman was?

VK: Yeah, that’s where he was bishop. He worked so hard because he wanted to show the Anglican Church was truly in the [Catholic] tradition, and he was not able to come up with that. He was a brilliant mind. So he chose to leave the Anglican Church and become Catholic. Do you want to hear about Newman?

TM: Yes.

VK: The trip to England was more about Newman than it was about the pope.

Newman, he went to Italy and he did not like Italy from what he knew about it before. He thought it was dirty and full of all kinds of people and was not as sophisticated as England was and the Roman Church was not nearly as high class as everybody else. So he went there and then he discovered so many different things. Father Dominick Barbary, the man who brought Newman into the Church, was a beggar. He would be out begging for people. Alphonsus Liguori was the same way. Then he met the academic people especially Father Perone who advised him a lot. He seemed to be enlivened by that. He thought, “These aren’t really people who are just academic and thinking they’re engaged with other people and trying to help.” His life seemed to change quite a bit. This is only my opinion, but in doing a lot of reading on him, because that’s what I was challenged to do when I was sent to KU was to do Newman’s work. He just seemed to be a different person. He was always at odds with his fellow Anglican academics and theologians and they were always disputing him. He found he could have that and then he found the other aspect of ordinary people simply doing things and living their faith. That was my discovery.
TM: Can you say a little more about the family planning classes you had at St. Lawrence? Sounds like they had some reception because as I’m sure you’re aware a lot of Catholics disagree with the Church over birth control.

VK: Yeah, and I think a lot of it is a misunderstanding. We had certified teachers who were teaching that to our engaged couples. As that program grew, students would say, “Nobody ever told us this stuff before. We never knew this.” They didn’t even know the whole biology or the physiology of it. Now, it has advanced far from here. We have a big program in Kansas City. We have a young woman who was a student at KU who became a medical doctor. She became a gynecologist. Now her whole life is working with this trying to help people. She’s putting out tapes and CDs helping people to understand it.

The problem in 1968 when the pope issued the encyclical at that time was we didn’t have any alternatives except what was called the rhythm method which most of the time was not effective. What he was doing was challenging the medical and scientific community to come to a better response than a chemical response. And a couple response rather than to just one person in the relationship. It’s growing and we have – even when I was in the parish at St. Anne’s and I started it there – people really liked it. It gave them a different perspective on it and the relationship. It was helpful to people.

TM: How long a course would that be?

VK: It would be eight weeks. See, the doctor gives the physiology of it, then we give the theology of it, and we give the practicality. It takes that time. If anyone is interested in pursuing that, then each person has a one on one with a practitioner who guides them. Then they go through that about six months to a year so they can see how things work.

Student: What other classes did you teach there?

VK: Did I teach?

Student: Sure, or classes that were taught there.

VK: I just taught what’s called the fundamentals of Catholicism. I spent most of my time running around trying to raise money and get things going. The other people would teach prayer, we would teach theology of the body – I don’t know if you’ve heard much about that. It is sort of the rage today. It’s really a good understanding of person. We taught lessons on sacramental theology and on the formation and foundation of scripture. We taught classes just on Catholicism in America and where we fit in with the other Christian groups. Those are mostly the classes. We also had a class on moral theology. How do you form your conscience and how do you make judgments that would help you grow and not diminish you.

TM: Were these classes with reading assignments and tests?
VK: No, we weren’t a class in that sense. We didn’t require the students to do any homework or written papers. We did have a group of students called the Young Catholic Scholars and they were a little bit more intense. We were able to provide them a scholarship and they had to write a paper each semester on some topic they were working on. Then we published a journal called the Young Catholic Scholars Journal. It was like a $5,000 scholarship so they had to other things if they received the scholarship. In doing their work and readings they found it very fascinating.

Student: Did any go on to divinity school?

VK: It’s interesting, from 1983 until just this past spring we’ve ordained to the priesthood 34 jayhawkers, that’s what I call them.

TM: People who went to the center? 34, wow.

VK: Yeah. Those are for many places, St. Louis, Wichita, Salina, and then Omaha and Chicago because you know KU has students from all over the place. Then we have seven women who are professed as women religious. They choose a lot of different orders because a lot of orders have different specializations.

Student: Have you kept up with any who have stayed here in Kansas?

VK: Yeah and I’m pretty proud of it. This guy we had two years ago is a chaplain at Hayden High School. He’s really getting involved with those high school kids. He flies a plane, and when they had home coming, he rented a plane and did this fly over and dropped down little foam rubber footballs. He is also in the band at KU. He’s really involved himself in student life. They’re top notch guys. Father Mitchel, I don’t know if you know him, he does our recruiting for religious life. He’s really an excellent guy.

TM: Despite that incredible record, numbers of priests continue to go down. Did that impact you and what you can do?

VK: No, it only inspired me in what we can do. I think we’ve turned a corner on that maybe. That’s just my opinion. Looks like we are doing better in that.

When Vatican Council II happened a lot of people thought celibacy would be optional rather than required and that was going to change. When that didn’t change I think a lot people started to look at it in different ways. Then we had a lot of priests who thought it would change, left and got married, and then of course it didn’t change and so that didn’t work either.

TM: To me it seems like for you to be the only priest there with all these programs going on it would stretch you awfully thin.
VK: Yeah I had always an assistant priest. Father Bill Porter was there for eight years with me, the Father Bill is another pilot. He used to fly at night. I always had an assistant and that’s why I could always be away from the center a lot to raise money.

TM: I guess you must have had quite a staff beyond that.

VK: Yes, I did. We had 21 people on our staff. It’s all changed. It’s not the same. Then we really were short on parking. We had a parking lot that only held 90 cars. We now have a parking facility which is an underground and top ground. I love it because when it’s really hot you can park underground and when it’s raining or snowing or anything it’s weatherproof almost.

TM: You’ve talked about the classes and things like that what about social life? Did you have meals or cookouts or dances?

VK: We had some of that. Really, we didn’t emphasize that a lot. We thought within the university there were many social things going on and we encouraged people to do that. We would have Sunday night suppers where people would come together for that because they didn’t serve suppers Sunday night in the residence halls. Then we would always have Thanksgiving dinner which is a big deal and a Christmas program. Mostly we really were focused on education.

That part is important for people if you want to have a whole program because we’re social beings. We like to recreate and have fun. We did have some dances early on when I was here in the Kansas Union. We did have an October Fest party. We got a polka band, it was great. Students loved it.

TM: Any of you have any questions you’d like to ask?

Student: What’s the single accomplishment you hold in the highest regard either you or the center was able to achieve?

VK: I think probably it would have been the actual construction of the center – the chapel. If you ever go there you’ll see it was really built as an education center. It doesn’t have a lounge or a TV or anything like that. One of the things I really enjoyed was being able to work with the School of Architecture one of the classes used us as a design program. One of the professors consulted us in hiring an architect to design the building. That was big. Being able to know that we have so many people interested in it and that they all came together. So it’s good being able to look at that for the material aspect.

For the spiritual aspect, I was really happy about all the students who graduate from KU and were active in Lawrence and who are now teaching in a Catholic school. We had a class in the School of Education about teaching in a Catholic school which the university let us have. So we have teachers that we prepared. We have students who don’t teach at Catholic schools so we have a program where we were able to certify teachers. We have
a lot of students who are active in parish work. I’m really happy to see all over in Wichita and Kansas City all of the bigger areas where our students are engaged in helping the Church to grow. So that probably would be my greatest feeling.

Student: Who was the professor you worked with in architecture?

VK: It was Professor Michael. He was really wonderful. He developed a questionnaire for us to send out to architects who might be interested. Most of the architects didn’t understand the letter. He was talking about ways you can put spiritual realities into form. How do you put ideas into form? He wanted to know what their process was. Our chapel particularly has received a lot of awards. House and Garden magazine did a story on us. They were from New York and we couldn’t figure out how they found out about us. They were very fascinated with the building.

TM: I don’t remember that but I’m not surprised. It’s a beautiful place.

VK: Yeah, it turned out really nice. It’s more of a medieval building. It’s a square building, simple on the inside.

Lou Michael was his name, the professor from architecture. His principle was there is only one real architect and that architect is God. Every other architect only imitates the true architect. Ever since then I can’t help but look at everything and think look at the combination of color or shape. You look at everything and think wow how did it all happen. Very interesting.

TM: Let me ask something different. You mentioned very briefly you were chaplain of the KU football team. What was that like?

VK: It was wonderful.

TM: Was it really?

VK: I have two bowl rings. But they were the Aloha Bowl not the Orange Bowl or Rose Bowl or anything like that. I really love it. What I found out was to be the chaplain of a team, and I had a co-chaplain a Reverend Barby and he and I were good friends, but it’s a whole family. You have a players, the band, the managers, and the parents, and it was great. We got to travel with the team and stay with them wherever we went. We would also try to be with the team a couple days a week at practice. So I was under five different coaches. The other day when they talked about building again I thought here we go, always rebuilding. I enjoyed the whole opportunity. We got to know the players pretty well. They always seem to want us around. One we played Florida State down there and we were coming home on a charter seat. Everyone is out of their seats talking about the game or whatever. Pretty soon the captain came on and said, “I’d like to have everyone take their seats. We have just lost an engine. We are going to teach you emergency landing procedures. We’re going to land in St. Louis.” Everybody gets scared you know and wants me to start praying but I was as scared as they were! So we
practice this emergency landing and when we got to St. Louis you could see all the lights from fire trucks and ambulances and it makes you think something is going to happen. But we landed safely. I tell you, it was a chore trying to get those players on another plane to fly back to Topeka. A couple coaches and assistants had to stay back and charter a couple of busses because they wouldn’t get on a plane again! For some of them it was the first time they had ever been on an airplane.

TM: Is that right?

VK: Yeah. I loved being chaplain of the team and going to the games. Then after the games there were good parties and those were fun. That was part of being in the university family. I found it very rewarding.

Student: How is it now? What do you do during the day?

VK: As retired? I have to be kind of careful because I don’t have any authority anymore. I have met with the football team once this year. Now I just go to the Leads Center for programs they have there. My cousin is actually president of their program board. Then I’ll go to different functions here. Sometime I’ll be invited to a retirement party. All of the people here when I was at the center are retiring now so it’s good to be with them.

TM: Do you have much to do with St. Lawrence Center?

VK: I help out there a lot but I just help out. I can’t make any decisions. Although, sometimes I slip into that mode. I have to catch myself.

TM: Do you celebrate mass?

VK: Yeah, I celebrate mass twice on Sunday and twice during the week. We have mass every day.

TM: I presume that was a big activity while you were there. Daily mass is pretty widespread in the Catholic Church.

VK: Yeah, yeah. We had that everyday and we also had mass at Danforth Chapel three times a week. Monday, Wednesday, and Friday. And we did weddings. Not very many funerals but a few from faculty members.

TM: Just to be clear, St. Lawrence Center is not a church.

VK: Right, we’re not a parish.

TM: Not a parish, right.
VK: We were not designed as a parish. One of the problems that they have, seems to be even more of a problem now, is that they have a lot of city and town folk who come there they’re really not university related. I think when that happens you can lose your focus on what you’re about. I used to say you have to university related, either student, faculty, staff, or administration.

TM: You couldn’t shut other people out could you?

VK: Well… sort of.

TM: I knew someone who attended there pretty regularly who was not student or faculty.

VK: We had some of that. I really didn’t want that to become normal. The other problem is if people like that get sick or need pastoral care, I couldn’t focus on that. That takes a lot of time. I didn’t want to take my focus off my responsibilities and what I was assigned for.

We did have some people who were very loosely related to the university. There was a couple and the woman was on some sort of advisory board for one of the sorority houses so that’s a pretty thin connection.

TM: It is. Do any of you have any other questions you’d like to ask Monsignor Vince?

Otherwise I don’t want to keep you all night.

VK: How long does your class go?

TM: We can go as long as two and half hours but we usually go an hour, hour and a half.

VK: Could I ask them a question?

TM: Please do.

VK: Did you learn anything?

Student: I thought it was really nice.

VK: Thank you. I hope I was able to contribute something to your understanding.

Student: I’ve never considered the family planning ideal as for both people. That’s interesting. It does beg the question, what about a male pill? But that’s still chemical.

VK: Yeah, still chemical. There’s a whole development in the psychology of love. What does it mean for two people to give themselves to each other out of love? It falls upon that in terms of your commitment. It removes the sexual relationship out of pure pleasure into a bigger reality.
You know, there was another thing that came from it that was surprising. Many of the married women who came to this to help would trust their husbands because they knew their husband really loved them because he was willing to engage in this. We had, in terms of the people who practice this, a divorce rate of 2%, so it’s really low. The whole mutual cooperation and mutual understanding really ties the relationship together.

So what do you think about that?

Student: It’s something I didn’t know. It’s something that, since I’ve learned it, I don’t think the Church is communicating very well. It’s appealing when one thinks as a young woman, “Why is this on me?”

VK: The interesting thing is, back in 1968, our understanding of fertility was less than a hundred years old. It was never an issue. We needed people to populate the world so it never became an issue until this time a hundred years ago.

I will never forget in 1968 when the pope wrote the letter he turned the Church upside down. He suffered a lot for it personally. I was a very young priest. I was only four years old as priest. My friends and I were all wondering what we were going to do. We have to talk about this on Sunday. What do we say? We didn’t agree with the pope and you can’t get up there and say that and keep your job. So we got this bright idea of quoting three theologians who support the pope and three theologians who don’t agree with the pope and just walk off. We were young and naïve and immature so we did that. After mass, there was this gentleman standing there waiting for me. He came up to me after everyone had gone and he said, “Young man, if you believe what you just did was the right thing, then I think you must leave the priesthood. And I’ll tell you what. I have an insurance brokerage and I will hire you at $25,000 a year to start.” He and his wife had nine children and he thought what I did was a big offence. He and I are really good friends now. I didn’t know what else to do so I ignored the question.

In about 1972, there was a program at St. Mary’s Hospital in Kansas City which is no longer there. I went to that, and there was a couple from Minnesota and we were talking about this, and there was a nun who was a medical missionary who worked in Africa and she was also a gynecologist. I thought it was very interesting. It was new. At the end of the conference this gentleman stood and he was a dairy farmer. He had his big overalls on and his hands in his pocket. He said, “You know I learned somethin’ tonight.” She asked, “What’s that?” He said, “I learned that my wife is fertile about 4% of the time, and I’m fertile 100% of the time. Now whose problem is it?”

I thought that was great. What an interesting question. Everyone had put it on the woman before. Our understanding of it is growing but it’s a big item. The pope thought the chemical response was just inadequate for the dignity of the human being. Everything he predicted in 1968 has come true. More infidelity in marriage, more divorce, more children outside of marriage, and the whole population thing.
This is an interesting thing. I was in Boston one time and I was talking to a priest there. The pope had gone to India a couple months before that and he saw what was happening with people and how does he do this? This priest said, “It was the request of the people of the third world not to approve.” Of course, the pope doesn’t make decisions on those bases, but they were afraid the first world nations would use chemical birth control as a form of genocide and they would have less in their population. That is exactly what has happened to us, we’ve lessened ourselves. They didn’t buy into it. They don’t practice it. We’re in a different position, so is Western Europe. Interesting thing about it is those are all Catholic countries like France, Italy, Germany. Had you heard that?

TM: No, I don’t think I have.

VK: It’s an interesting perspective to it. The Doctor Djrassi, he was one of the three who developed that. He came out a year ago and said it’s the worst thing he ever did. He’s caused Austria to commit national suicide.

Student: Scandinavia, I believe, is also in negative population growth.

VK: Yeah. So, I can see in the near future we’re going to be encouraging people to have as many children as they can because we’ll need to grow the population base.

TM: There are countries I believe who pay a bonus for children.

VK: Yeah, through the income tax. I dunno, hope we can get over this some day.

TM: Well, if you can solve all the world’s problems for us, please let us know.

VK: Any other questions? Did you find it interesting?

Student: I did.

VK: Good.

TM: Not hard to see you have good relationships with students. A lot of practice.

VK: Oh, yeah. I love working with students. When I got to that parish, it was so different.

Student: I wanted to ask about that. How long were you there?

VK: Four years, and they were really nice people. The disadvantage I had there is I never worked with older people and I worked with a lot there. I had five funerals every day. But it was interesting because it brought me into a whole new area of life I hadn’t gone into very much. I had done some here, but not a lot. Visiting people who were in a home and couldn’t go any place – I came to love that. We had a great school academically and we had excellence awards from Kansas Board of Education. And I had
never worked with little kids before. This is very interesting, too. I can tell you some funny stories about those kids. You walk out of your office and walk by the playground, “Hi, monsignor!” and they’re jumping up and down. I tried to get people fired up and it was hard to do. It’s not their fault, it was my fault, and I couldn’t get them to do it. It was not hard to fire students up. It was wonderful you never had to worry about that.

Student: Students are here every day and a lot of the people were only there one day a week.

VK: That’s right. You’re right. That is true. People in an education environment were in an education environment. It was easier to get them interested.

TM: Well, thank you for coming in. I hope your retirement in Lawrence is wonderful in every way.

VK: Thank you for the invitation I really enjoyed it. Thank you for your intention. If you ever come back call like an hour before. Oh, I am so embarrassed. I had some problems at my house and had a plumber come by so I got distracted. Now you can say, “Oh, I know why you’re retired! You don’t know where you’re supposed to be.”