

# Respect for Earth Is Passionists'

## Thomas Berry Place retreat house adapts Earth Day vision

by Paula Katinas, Senior Reporter

JAMAICA ESTATES — Every day is Earth Day for the priests at the Passionists Monastery, where preserving the environment is their year-round commitment.

They reopened their retreat house — now called Thomas Berry Place — on Ash Wednesday and have nearly completed an upgrade that includes such amenities as solar panels, an organic garden and a “green wall” — a vertical structure filled with plant life that is sustained by running water and acts as a natural air filter.

To mark the official “Earth Day” — Friday, April 22 — the Passionists held a ribbon-cutting for the grand opening of Thomas Berry Place and the planting of a 16-foot-tall tree on the grounds in Berry’s memory.

Located at the site of the former Bishop Molloy Retreat Center, Thomas Berry Place is named in honor of Father Thomas Berry, CP (1914-2009), a Passionist priest who lived for a time at the Jamaica Estates monastery, taught at St. John’s University and Fordham University, and was an advocate for the environmental movement in his writings and teachings.

The renovation of the center is part of a \$6 million project designed to make the monastery’s grounds more environmentally-friendly. The project includes the installation of solar panels, which are expected to provide 70%-80% of the electricity for the monastery and Thomas Berry Place.

The priests will also plant a garden with

lettuce, tomatoes, cucumbers and other vegetables. Come harvest time, they will follow a plant-based diet of meals prepared by an in-house chef.

More than 30 planters — each to have its own crop — have been placed on the hillside overlooking Edgerton Boulevard. Planting will begin soon, said Joseph Geraci, director of development.

The renovation is in keeping with the spirit of Pope Francis’ 2015 *Laudato Si’* encyclical in which the Holy Father urges the faithful to take care of the environment. The ceiling in the reception area of

Thomas Berry Place depicts the creation of the universe.

“Thomas Berry’s whole point was that if we don’t reconnect to the universe and to our common story, we’re losing — first the great revelation of God, which is that the first revelation of God is the universe,” said Father Jim O’Shea, provincial for the Passionists in the mainland U.S., Canada and the Caribbean.

Thomas Berry Place will be the site of retreats and conferences hosted by the Passionists, a religious order of priests whose formal name is the Congregation of the Passion of Jesus Christ and whose mission is to connect



Thomas Berry remembered as center is dedicated in his name | PAGE 30

**Father Jim O’Shea, the provincial of the Passionists for the Eastern U.S., in front of the living wall. Flower beds (below) will grow vegetables this summer.**



# Mission as Priests

to the suffering of Jesus Christ during the Passion and to work to relieve suffering in the world.

The Passionists’ mission also includes taking care of the earth, according to Father O’Shea, who said the renovation “is meant to show that we live by our word and we’re also trying to show it in action.”

Respect for the environment also means not wasting resources, and to that end, Thomas Berry Place is furnished with re-used, rather than new, furnishings.

“The furniture and the furnishings that are used are made of recycled materials or involve some recycled materials,” Geraci explained, “so that every detail is really just in keeping with the mission of renewal.”

## Earth Day

■ Earth Day originated in the United States: The first Earth Day was celebrated on April 22, 1970.

■ By 1990, Earth Day became recognized as a worldwide holiday.

■ On Earth Day 2011, the Earth Day Network organized the “Plant Trees Not Bombs” campaign, where 28 million trees were planted in Afghanistan.

■ The United Nations chose Earth Day 2016 to sign the Paris Agreement — the most significant global accord in history to combat climate change.



The monastery grounds are designed to provide quiet time to pray (above). When the solar panels (below) are fully operational, the Passionists expect that solar energy will provide approximately 70-80% of the electricity for the monastery. (Photos: Paula Katinas)

