



REV. KEITH MUNNEKE
*Founder and Sr. Pastoral Counselor
retires from Samaritan Counseling
Center after 42 years of service*

Dear Friend of Samaritan Counseling Center,

It is with nervous excitement that I am writing to you to announce my retirement from Samaritan Counseling Center. When I founded SCC in 1974, I did so because **I felt that it was my Christian mission to provide healing to those who were hurting or in pain.** I have been committed to serving our community in this way for more than 40 years, and have loved every minute of it. However, as I age I realize that my time with my family is unknown, so I would like to devote more of it to them.

I will truly miss the work that I do and the people I have helped while at Samaritan Counseling Center. Giving up my life's calling is difficult to imagine, but I am happy to leave on a positive note – while I still have deep compassion for others and am proud of the impact I have made. While it's likely that I will still serve SCC in some capacity this spring, I am looking forward to spending the winter in sunny Florida.

I am amazed by what Samaritan Counseling Center has become over the years. As an ordained Lutheran pastor, faith has always played a significant part in my life. Because of this, I was committed to ensuring that our region had a counseling center that valued clients' spirituality as an integral part of the healing process. Though we began as just a small office at Christ the King Lutheran Church, **we've grown to be a safe place for people of all backgrounds and belief systems.**

Doing this as my life's work has taught me many things. I've learned to be more tolerant, patient, and forgiving. I know that everyone has a story behind their conflict, and once you come to appreciate that, it's much easier to be compassionate toward their struggle. I've learned how to be a better listener, and learned the importance of withholding judgment - which has helped me come to understand my relationship with Christ in a way that I didn't when I was younger.

There are so many people who deserve to be recognized for playing a part in Samaritan Counseling Center's success. The pastors, leaders, and entire community of Christ the King Lutheran Church might not have known exactly what they were getting into when they allowed me to begin offering counseling services in the library 40-some years ago; but, true to their word, their support for our work has never wavered. **To every therapist, administrator, volunteer, member of our Board of Directors, client, donor, advocate, and friend of SCC – *thank you.*** Thank you for sharing your time, talent, and treasure in support of our mission and ministry.

Thank you, also, to my wonderful wife, Ruth. I have been so lucky to spend the last sixty years with her by my side. She has offered support both at Samaritan Counseling Center and at home, helping me to fulfill my calling. She is a true blessing.

I will certainly miss the relationships that I have built with this community over the years. I will miss the privilege of people sharing their lives with me and am honored and humbled by their willingness to do so. I will miss working with my capable and caring colleagues, though am confident in their ability to continue to carry out our mission and ministry.

Since 1974, Samaritan Counseling Center has cared for tens of thousands of people in our community and it is my hope that we can continue to offer a safe place for people to seek the care they need to live fuller, happier lives. But we cannot do this without your help.

I have seen many positive changes for mental health care over the years, but also know there is still work to be done. I'm happy to say that, because of advocates like you, the stigma surrounding mental illness is steadily decreasing. Please continue to be accepting of people struggling with mental illness. As I mentioned before, this job has taught me a lot about tolerance, patience, and forgiveness – all things that I hope you, too, can offer to people who may be hurting. **I encourage people to talk more about mental health.** Seeking care does not mean you are broken, it simply means you are taking steps to become more whole.

I also urge you to continue supporting Samaritan Counseling Center's Client Assistance Fund through donations. For more than 40 years, we have been committed to helping people get the care they need – including those with limited resources.

When I started this journey many decades ago, I was able to do so because I had the support of people who believed in the importance of opening a counseling center that was faith friendly. After all these years, I still believe in this message, acknowledging the important role spirituality plays for many people. Please help us continue doing this important work.

Join me in supporting the mission and ministry of Samaritan Counseling Center.

Sincerely,
Rev. Keith Munneke
Senior Pastoral Counselor