

August 24th 2021

Dear Friends of the St Francis Centre,

We are so very pleased to be able to say that, after some 19 months, the Centre is preparing to open its doors once again. And while the process will be slow, and a multitude of changes will be in place, being able to open our doors is gratifying.

We realize that the Covid-19 virus has not been eradicated, and the new Delta variant seems to be accelerating the fourth wave within our province. Daily numbers continue to rise among the non-vaccinated population.

The St Francis Centre has been working very closely with the Wellington Dufferin Guelph Public Health Department in order to best move forward during these unprecedented times. Many protocols have been put in place and numerous changes have been made to both the physical and operational standards of the Centre. These have been done to ensure the health and safety of everyone who enters here, be it for work, visit, or join in a retreat.

To highlight some of the many safety measures in place at this time, the following outline will hopefully not only provide information but also peace of mind.

Regarding the number of retreatants that may attend at any one time...

There have been many directives coming out regarding gatherings. It began with 5, then 10, and then the gatherings were given in percentages. 25% of capacity or 30% of capacity and so on...

While these numbers are precise and easy to calculate, there is always a second part to the directive. Everyone must "maintain social distance". And it is this statement that dictates the number of people for us here at St. Francis. For us to keep individuals 2 meters apart...whether that is in the chapel, or the dining room, or the meeting rooms, our number cannot exceed 24. This includes everyone in the group...participants, leaders, etc.,

With regards to sleeping, we will only be using the top two floors, whose being single rooms. And, currently, we hope to be offering overnight retreats in October. Again, the number of participants will remain at 24.

Under the guidance of the health department, the Centre has changed its methods for welcoming guests, service, and cleaning. As guests arrive, the Health Department has provided us with a form that each participant must fill out. These are standard questions with regards to Covid history and contact, travel, and wellness. Also at this time, a contactless temperature check will be taken of each participant. Guests will be advised of any new house rules.

Regarding the use of masks. The health department requires that masks be always worn while in the Centre. This means that while in the halls, common areas or moving throughout the building, both guests and staff must wear a mask. However, while in the retreat room...example San Damiano or Santa Chiara, or while eating, your masks can be removed. Masks are not required outside as long as social distance is maintained.

There are social distancing markers on the floor in most areas of the building. Please try to adhere to these as much as possible.

The dining room now has only 2 chairs per table and is set up to maintain social distancing standards. You will notice that there are no longer napkin dispensers or any other common touch items on the tables. According to the Public Health Department, all food service items must be handed to you by the staff.

As you move along through the food service area, you will also notice that there are no self-serve areas such as the salad bar or the dessert table. Again, these items will gladly be served to you by the staff.

The snack service that so many of you enjoyed on a regular basis has also been changed. The availability of snacks will now be serviced through the Snack Shop, located outside San Damiano. Hours and use will be posted on the door. Information for group leaders may be obtained through the main office.

In conjunction with the health department, new cleaning products and methods have been employed to ensure the safety of all who frequent the Centre. An outside commercial cleaning company has been employed to clean and sanitize the Centre prior to the start of opening. And moving forward, Ecolab has provided new multi-surface cleansers made specifically for high-tough areas and alternate disinfectants for all food surface areas such as tables and kitchen areas. We continue to provide a high-tech double UV technology system for the

water to ensure its safety and proceed with rigorous monthly testing beyond what is required by public health.

The Centre has also purchased a high-tech fogger for all large areas that include soft furniture. This multi surface fogger will ensure that all surfaces can be disinfected prior to any group entering an area. This system is in place currently in many of the churches within our diocese.

Please be assured that all staff at the St Francis Centre have been double vaccinated. Pope Francis has reminded each of us that we need to do our part to protect each other. He states that “this is an act of love”. And in keeping with this mindset, we have made it mandatory at this point for all participants coming to the Centre to be vaccinated. We hope that our efforts, combined with those of so many others, will help to bring this virus under control and assist everyone in returning to normal as quickly as possible.

All these measures are being done to ensure the safety of yourselves and all who wish to enjoy the use of the St Francis Centre. We understand that the situation is fluid, and we hope that it continually improves. However, we also realize that, if we all do our part, we will be able to move forward in a healthy and promising manner.

As mentioned earlier, we hope to open in October. Please check back here next week for upcoming retreats to join.

Thank you and please continue to be safe,

Mary Volpe

Director of St. Francis Centre