



July 29, 2020

Dear Friends and Colleagues,

In a Palm Sunday homily an Archbishop from the Philippines said that COVID-19 has reminded us in a powerful way that we are not in control; God is in control. That truth became abundantly clear to us as we grappled with the decision of whether or not to re-open the Loretto College Residence for September 2020.

Our ministry at Loretto College has over 100 years of tradition behind it. The fact that every year the demand for space results in a “full house” led us to believe that we would be able to sustain this ministry for many more years with lay leadership, carrying on the tradition and maintaining the ethos of IBVM mission and Mary Ward’s charism.

So, it is with great sadness that we have made the painful decision not to re-open the doors of the Loretto College residence for the fall semester of 2020. Our hope is that by January, the COVID situation will have improved and we can re-open for the second semester.

Of course, this decision was not made lightly. However, facing all of the facts gathered over the last weeks, we cannot, in good conscience, promise the staff and students that we can provide a safe environment for them.

Furthermore, with the decline in our overall income due to the implications of COVID, IBVM simply cannot absorb the extra costs associated to safely open in September and with only half the number of fee paying residents.

Emily VanBerkum, Dean, Alice Gomes, Assistant Dean, and Mary Lombardo, Facilities Manager, have been in constant communication with Toronto Public Health, Compass Foods, and Commissionaires Security (which also manages reception). Each of these entities has recommended costly procedures and protocols that they see necessary for safety.

Sr Carmen Diston and Mary Ann Leon, our Consulting Accountant have been calculating the financial impact of having fewer students (one to a room) and the increased cost of special equipment and additional staff required to implement all the requirements of more and more frequent cleaning and sanitization, and monitoring of students 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

At the forefront of our minds has been the impact on our loyal and committed staff. Both the required changes in working hours and the risk associated with exposure to students will have a detrimental impact not only their personal lives but also that of their families.

Both the Province of Ontario and the City of Toronto are expecting a “second wave” of infections as they move into phase 3 of opening up more businesses. As well, the highest rate of recent infections is in the 20-40 age group who do not seem to be taking the risk of transmission seriously and are engaging in risky behaviour. Our ability to provide suitable space for students who must isolate or be in quarantine is limited and the impact of extra work for existing staff or the cost of additional staff in case of a lockdown would be prohibitive.

Yesterday morning two representatives of Toronto Public Health led us through a checklist of the requirements for “congregate living facilities”. Many of the recommended changes are beyond our capacity to implement due to the design of the building and the kind of furnishings we have. Others would require a significant increase in staff for both housekeeping and food services.

We have been advised that now that we have those recommendations, failure to comply would open the door to legal liability.

Inability to gather in groups will make creating any sense of community among the residents impossible reducing us to essentially running a boarding house, which is not the mission of Loretto College.

We regret this decision to keep the doors closed very much and we hope and pray that we will be able to open the doors of Loretto again for the second semester beginning in January 2021.

A block of three handwritten signatures in black ink. The first signature is 'Evanne Hunter', the second is 'Mary Mallany', and the third is 'Jane McDonnell'. The signatures are written in a cursive, flowing style.

Sr Evanne Hunter, Sr Mary Mallany and Sr Jane McDonnell
IBVM Canada Leadership Team